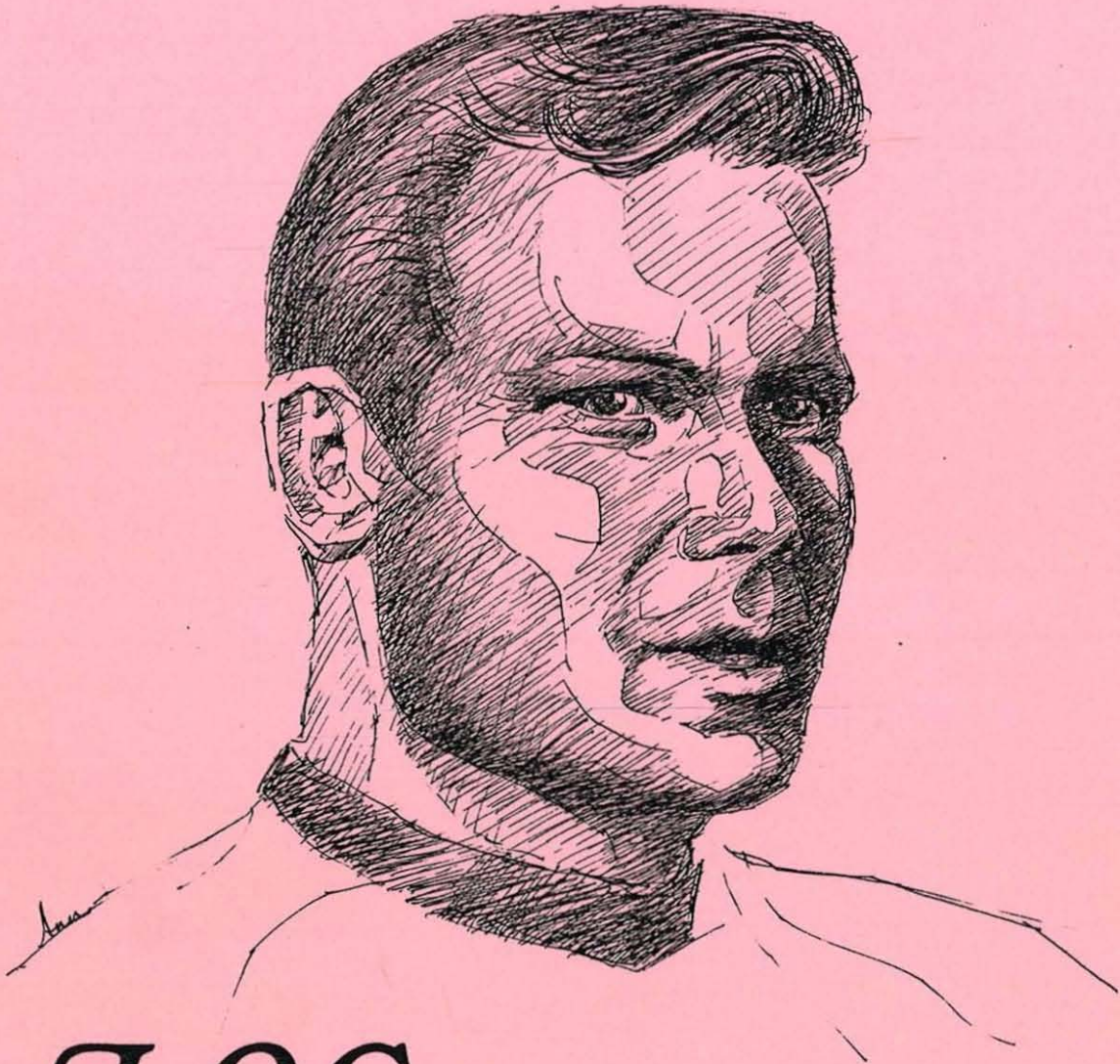


ENTERPRISE :



LOG

ENTRIES 68

a STAR TREK
fanzine

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ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona

Hello, and welcome to Enterprise - Log Entries 68.

We have two new writers for you this issue, Val Kyrie and Elaine Sheard; we hope to see many more stories from both (not that we're hinting, ladies!) It is also nice to welcome back Christine Hall, who is of course one of fandom's best-known writers. We know she is thinking about a sequel to The Gnaar, and hope to see it soon.

Other stories this issue are by regular writers Brenda Kelsey, Vicki Richards and Janice Pitkethley, so we think you will find a good variety of story. Our thanks also to our poets.

You will also notice Janet's latest 'baby' this issue, a new printer which will (I am assured) produce near letter quality print. This should make things easier for those of you whose eyesight is good enough to have let you distinguish each individual dot in the last few Log Entries.

In fact someone at Sol III *did* complain to me that she disliked "computer-produced zines". Those of you who have been involved in zine production will be very much aware of the amount of work this entails, and will understand our heartfelt sighs of relief at anything that lightens the load. Zines typed on the computer are more easily corrected than zines typed onto stencil; and while we admit that something typed with a daisy wheel does look beautiful, the dot matrix printer is far more flexible. We hope that our new system will be even more pleasant to read for our regular readers, and will help to satisfy the perfectionists among you!

We now have a very pleasant announcement to make. You will all be familiar with the work of Jennifer Gutteridge from New Voyages. It is a long time since any of her stories have appeared in a zine, and those that did were mostly printed in America. Jennifer has kindly given us permission to print some of her unpublished material, and we hope to produce at least two issues of Enterprise Incidents next year containing her stories. I am looking forward to this as a great treat, and I'm sure that any Star Trek fan will agree that stories by Jennifer Gutteridge are a 'must'. We will announce publication date and price as soon as possible, but the zines will not be ready before next spring.

We are preparing now for Enterprise Con in Liverpool, and we hope to see as many of you as possible there.

Peace! Valerie

As usual we welcome submissions of fiction, poetry and artwork for ScoTpress zines. We are looking for series-based action-adventure stories, preferably with some character inter-relationship. Alternate universe stories are acceptable, but even these should not be movie-based, K/S, or involve the death of main characters, or be primarily about other ships. These are, after all, "The voyages of the Starship Enterprise..."

Submissions may be sent to either -

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For Once I Read or Heard it Sung



by

Brenda Kelsey



I spent today watching a family of unicorns.

Jim and Bones have left me alone for the first time since my return from the amoeba; their concern for me has been so overwhelming.

They insisted I accompany them on the long-awaited shore leave,

And they have hovered around me, refusing the normal pursuits that they would have indulged in had I not been with them.

This morning I persuaded them to allow me to spend the day alone. I left them to walk in the hills surrounding the cottage.

In truth I have not travelled far, a few miles only.

I am still so weak, though I believe I have concealed the true extent of my disability from them.

I was sitting in the sun, shielded from the wind by some rocks, when the unicorns came to feed and play in the meadow below my resting place.

I have spent the day watching them.

They delight me. So tiny, graceful. So fragile, yet so strong.

They remind me of the tales Mother told me when I was young.

The unicorns of legend, and dragons.
Hobbits and magic rings.
Pooh and Piglet and Owl.
Fairies, Elves and Giants.
Wizards, Warlocks and Witches.
Narnia.
King Arthur and his Knights.
Robin Hood and his Merrie Men.
William Tell. Zorro. The Lone Ranger.

Earth was filled with wonders and glories and adventures.
And the young me ached to be with them.

Earth was a shattering disappointment.

How could this place which was so cold and damp,
filled with strange, biting winds that swept out of a blue sky,
that was cloaked in drab colours, and was so dismally, totally green,

How could this be the land of so many wonderful legends?

I remember that I wept, bitterly and in absolute secrecy, for my lost dreams.

The unicorns have finally left and I move stiffly down the hillside towards the cottage.

I am so tired: and I am cold. I sat for too long watching the unicorns.

Night is coming swiftly and I neglected to bring a hand light with me. I stumble on a shadowy hillock and a few paces on stumble again.

Finally I see the lights of the cottage blazing out below me; a beacon in the gathering darkness, drawing me towards it.

Jim and Bones have been watching for my return.

They are both hurrying to meet me. They can see that I can not conceal my weariness and so know that I have lied to them a little.

They will doubtless scold me and cosset me and hover about me for the rest of our stay here.

I feel a strange warmth inside me as they run towards me.

I was wrong, all those long years ago.

Earth is a place of legends;

and heroes.



AGAINST the ODDS



by

Vicki Richards

Feeling inordinately relieved that the duty shift was over, James T. Kirk gave the conn to his Senior Helmsman and left the Bridge. As the obedient turbolift took him to Deck 5, he waited quietly, allowing the rhythms of his ship to wash over him, the knowledge that the Starship ran in perfect, well-tended order soothing away the tensions of the day.

And what a day! He wasn't often *this* glad that a shift was over, but the experiences of the last few hours had been enough to make anyone glad of a few hours rest.

The turbolift deposited him at his destination, and he made his way to his quarters, unable to stop a sigh of relief escaping him as the doors of his cabin closed protectively behind him. Programming the synthesiser for a cup of coffee, he retrieved the hot drink and sat at his desk. Various items of paperwork awaited him as always, but there was nothing so pressing that he couldn't spend a short while doing what he wanted to.

He needed to think, to assimilate what had happened to the three of them down on that planet; and he was pretty certain that in the cabin next door his First Officer, whose shift had finished an hour before his, was doing exactly the same thing in his own Vulcan way. A momentary mental image of Spock meditating before the Firepot brought a brief smile to his face, and the tensions began to lift. He'd give it a couple of hours and ask him if he felt like a game of chess.

No - maybe this time it shouldn't be just him and Spock; McCoy was likely to need company at the present moment more than either of them. He decided against chess, and determined instead to ask his friends to join him in the mess. McCoy shouldn't be allowed to spend his off-duty hours alone in his Sickbay office, which was where he probably would be if Kirk didn't arrange otherwise. For all that the doctor had warned Spock of the dangers of overwork, if Kirk knew Bones he'd be doing exactly the same thing himself, immersing himself in work for therapy. McCoy could probably use his friends' company tonight.

It wasn't by any means the first time that one of them had almost not come back from a mission. Yet that didn't make it any easier to accept. Danger was part of the job - they all knew that. And they were all professionals; within a couple of days the near-tragedy would be just another memory; they were psychologically capable of dealing with such experiences very well, or none of them would be in Starship service. All the same, the fact that one of them had nearly not returned from a mission disturbed all of them, and Kirk reckoned that some quiet social conversation and a drink would certainly help to repair the effects of the trauma they'd been through.

Gratefully sipping the coffee, Kirk thought back on what had happened. This time it had been Bones who nearly hadn't come back. And it could have been any one of them. It had been so... so close. Sometimes it seemed the three of them had some vigilant guardian angel

looking after them, they had beaten the odds so many times. And that was really the only way to look at it; to keep on believing that, whatever the circumstances, they would always, somehow, make it through.

Probably Spock would say that was illogical - or would he? Spock had changed a great deal, grown, since he had first met him, though maybe the subtle changes wouldn't be obvious to anyone who didn't know the Vulcan well. No matter what Spock's protestations to the contrary were he knew - and Spock knew he knew - that his Vulcan friend had come to understand Human motivations and needs better than a lot of Humans did.

So probably Spock wouldn't rebuke him for clinging to that very important Human emotion - hope for the future - because even to entertain the thought that one day one of them wouldn't make it was completely intolerable.

And who knows? thought Kirk, *I might just be right - we might have a guardian angel. He certainly found one today.*

McCoy had been seconds away from death, and he and Spock hadn't been able to do anything. Kirk didn't want ever again to have to go through what he'd felt at that moment. It had shaken them all, and he knew it had affected Spock deeply. They had both been at McCoy's side, waiting for him to die, not believing anything could happen to save him. Then an alien woman who had only just met them miraculously risked her own life to bring McCoy back from the brink. Bones had certainly been right when he had called her Gem.

And *that* was the real miracle - not the incredible powers she possessed, but the fact that she had been willing to risk sacrificing her own life for a man she hardly knew, because in the three of them she had seen qualities, and a friendship, that was worth risking so much for. For the rest of his life Kirk knew he would be indescribably grateful to her. She had also made him feel very humble. He hoped from the bottom of his heart that the Vians would indeed be able to save her planet.

He sipped at the coffee again, not really tasting it. He couldn't help but think how different the result of it all would have been without Gem's intervention. Or about the fact that without McCoy's own earlier intervention it would have been Spock lying there, horribly injured. The Vians had estimated that Spock had a far better chance of surviving their 'experiment' than McCoy, but at what a price. Insanity would have been worse than death to the Vulcan - and could Gem's powers have healed that?

It would be a very long time before Kirk would be able to think of the Vians without anger. For supposedly intelligent beings to put others in such a position was unthinkable, no matter what the motives behind it were. And if they hadn't finally been able to convince the Vians that Gem's own death wasn't needed to prove the validity of the experiment, then she would truly have sacrificed herself for them. Because she hadn't known that her decision to do so would convince her captors that her race was capable of possessing qualities making them worthy of being the one planet the Vians were able to save from the inferno of its sun going nova.

When he considered it, really the only good thing to come out of the whole affair - apart from the saving of Gem's people - was to have it proved so forcefully that what he had long known was true, that he, Spock and McCoy had something which was capable of influencing the

Vians' decision - their very special friendship, and the things they all believed in.

All three had been willing to die to save the others. Very few people ever found friends like that. And even though he still felt badly shaken, it warmed him to think how Spock, in his own way, had been able to show what he felt for McCoy when they had both believed him to be dying.

Yes, he thought, *Spock has come a long way.* Then he changed his mind about the paperwork; it could wait. *We all need company tonight - I'll go and see Spock now.*

In the cabin next door the scene was much as Kirk had imagined. Spock sat before the Firepot in the characteristic pose of a Vulcan in meditation. Finally he shifted position, bringing himself back to the level of everyday consciousness.

He too thought of the others, and understood how deeply the experiences of the day had affected them.

It is illogical to deny that which exists, he told himself again. The disciplines of control did work for him as an antidote to trauma, but even so, no longer could he deny the emotions that once he would not have allowed to surface. Even if he maintained the Vulcan facade with others, to himself he had to admit that they existed. And it was thanks to his friendship with Jim that he could do so without experiencing the dreadful shame he once would have known at such an admission.

And though he did still appear fully Vulcan to those who did not know him well, Jim and McCoy knew very well the changes that had taken place in him over the last few years; although he might still deny it even to them, all three of them knew he had taken the first steps towards accepting the Human half whose existence he had once refused to admit. All thanks to Jim.

He was glad it was so; to have been unable to show how he felt, even in his own understated way, when McCoy had lain there dying, would have been wrong, and an insult to the friendship between them. For all their verbal battles, the friendship between him and the good doctor was something which neither truly wished to deny. Yes, he was glad he had been able to show something of what he felt - and perhaps it was not really so illogical. He doubted whether Sarek would ever be able to understand such a thing, but Spock himself had finally come to the conclusion that it was Sarek, not he, who perhaps lacked something in the way of perception, excellent ambassador though he was.

Jim Kirk, of all the individuals in the universe, had been the only one to be able to show him that both parts of his inheritance, the Vulcan and the Human, could give him things of value, their special relationship being the most important of all. And in a strange way it didn't seem odd that it should be a Human who should help him perceive the ideals of IDIC more fully, relating them to his own two-sided personality with an ease that by himself he had never been able to see.

So he used the Vulcan disciplines to control the undoubtedly emotional effects of what they had been through. Because of his Vulcan half, he was probably able to cope better with those effects than his two friends - though in their own way they too would deal with it. And surely it was therefore logical that he should use his Human half to reach out and help them, if he could. He owed it to them to try. Such

friends, who had both been willing to die for him (and he for them) deserved that he should try; they did *not* deserve to be rewarded by his emotional withdrawal.

And he had been tempted. Still it was difficult not to withdraw behind the wall of emotional suppression when faced with such circumstances. The old, ingrained reactions died hard, and he still believed in the Vulcan way - it was, in the end, right for him. He did not ever wish to become fully Human in his reactions, and he was grateful to Jim and McCoy for not expecting him to. But the emotions did exist, nonetheless.

He remembered how he had felt - yes, felt - when he and Jim had been trapped in the Vians' force field, watching helplessly while McCoy's life ebbed away. But without his Vulcan self-examination he doubted whether he could have recognised the nature of the force field. Their own emotions had kept them prisoner, and only by suppression had he been able to escape, and to show Jim the way. He did not deny the flash of amusement he felt as he wondered how long it would take Jim to work out that he, Spock, had also been trapped in the field by his own emotions. Not long, if he knew James Kirk.

Someone was at the door to his quarters; he knew it was Jim before he came in.

"Come in, Captain," he said, deliberately allowing a tone of affection to creep into his voice. "I have been expecting you."

Though the temptation to retreat into his shell was strong he would not give in to it. Not after all the Vians had put them through. If he had to do it with others till the effects were past, still he could not distance himself from Jim and McCoy. He would *not* do it. He owed them more than that. Friendship such as they had showed him over the years deserved some return, and he would give it, no matter what the cost to himself.

Jim smiled, and looked at him as if he knew everything he'd been thinking. "I hope I'm not intruding, Spock, but I could do with a little company."

"You are not intruding, Jim," he replied, allowing the half-smile he could only use with Kirk to appear. "And I believe McCoy might also welcome our presence tonight."

Kirk smiled again, more than relieved that Spock hadn't retreated behind iron control. "I think you're right, Spock. Shall we go?"

Kirk had been wrong about McCoy's whereabouts. He had left Sickbay as soon as his duties allowed, and he also had gone to the privacy of his cabin. The physician in him had told him that he needed a rest, but he had not been able to sleep, and he was unwilling to take any sleeping tablets or other tranquillisers. He was a psychologist too, and knew it would be best if he worked through the trauma without artificial aids. He had to get over it himself before he could help anyone else, and he'd better do it quickly. He was Chief Medical Officer, and it was his job; but it was because he was their friend that he wanted to help Jim - and Spock, if he would let him. Always provided that he *could* help them. Knowing those two, they'd get over the experience with the Vians on their own, but he still wanted to give any help he could.

God knew how many times one or more of them had returned to the

ship after nearly not making it. It wasn't the first time by far that they'd had some kind of near-disaster to cope with emotionally. He'd begun to wonder if something in the weapon the Vians had used against them had deepened the emotional wounds. Maybe; he wasn't sure yet. He'd have to get Jim and Spock down to Sickbay the next day and run some tests, see if he could come up with anything. Funny how he could cope with his own near-death better than he could accept that it could have been either of his friends who might have died or lost his sanity.

His mind jumped back and forth, unable to concentrate properly, so he let it have its rein, and the images of the day flowed over him. Best to get it all out of his system now; he had a job to do, and he had to be fit enough to do it.

Gem. He didn't think he'd ever forget meeting her. A true empath. And she'd been willing to risk her life for them, people she hardly knew. He couldn't think of the Vians without mounting anger at what they'd almost done to them all. Surely no motive excused that. He hoped Gem would be all right, she and her people.

Then a picture came into his mind of Spock sitting by Jim as he slept under the effects of exhaustion and tranquilliser, and of Gem coming forward to touch him. That was something else he'd never forget, the look on Gem's face as she touched the Vulcan, reading what he thought and felt. The look on her face as she smiled had been one of... wonder. Yes, that was the right word.

Spock, you old fraud, thought McCoy, and smiled despite himself. What wouldn't he give to be able to read Spock as she had done. Poor Spock would probably be horrified. He'd love to see the look on Jim's face when he confronted Spock about it - he could just visualise Jim trying not to laugh, and Spock's expression of haughty denial, which they all knew was a put-on. Though he'd deny that too, of course.

Thinking of his friends cheered him, but it was immediately followed by a wave of depression as he realised again just what he'd have felt if he'd lost one of them.

He eased his position on the bed a little. He still expected to find bruises, at the least; his subconscious didn't seem able to take in the fact that Gem and the Vians had healed him completely. Yet they had, and even his Sickbay scanners had been unable to detect any residual injury. Angry thoughts of the Vians surfaced again as he thought of Gem.

No, this is no good! he told himself firmly. *Sometimes it's best not to think about it. Taking your mind off it can be therapy too. Enough, McCoy!*

With the intention of going in search of Kirk and Spock he began to raise himself off the bunk. Just at that moment his friends found him; he went to the door in response to the buzz, and keyed it to open.

"This a deputation?" he drawled, knowing they'd understand it really meant, 'I'm glad to see you.'

"In a way," Kirk grinned. "We thought you might like to join us in the mess - I don't think any of us have eaten properly for hours."

"Trust Jim Kirk to be thinking of his stomach," said McCoy, coming out of his cabin. "I guess I'd better come along and make sure you eat what's good for you!"

Kirk ignored the insult - he'd get his own back later... as soon as he thought of a suitable reply.

"How are you feeling now, McCoy?" It was Spock who broached the subject, deliberately asking the question as a Human might.

McCoy immediately dropped all idea of teasing Spock with Gem's reaction to him. Not when Spock was making that kind of gesture.

"Physically I'm okay, Spock - and thank you for asking. I guess it's just the emotional effects that'll take a little longer to forget."

"Indeed," said Spock, not trying to pretend that it was too different for him.

"We all have a lot to be grateful to Gem for," Kirk said, putting into words what was in all their minds. "If not for her, one of us wouldn't be here now."

"It doesn't bear thinking about," said McCoy, "and I don't think I want to."

Spock nodded. "I agree, Doctor. Also about the beneficial effects of the drink you are planning to have. I think perhaps this time I shall join you."

Kirk and McCoy stared at him and at each other in amazement. "Well," said Kirk affectionately, "if it's affected you *that* much, Spock, I think we'd better join *you*."

Spock's only answer was a suitably dignified eyebrow, which told his two friends as much as Gem had learned by touching him. It was true - friends were empathes anyway.

deja vu



I feel as if I have been here before,
But that's illogical.
I feel as if I've known you
Other places - other times.
Those deep brown eyes, I'm sure they've looked
Into my depths and known me.
Why do I feel as one with you?
As if all your aims were mine.
We are different in appearance,
Humanoid, but subtly altered.
Could I ever live on your world?
And what do you think of Earth?
Are you my reincarnation?
Will I find you in the future?
Or shall I still be an Earthwoman
And perhaps, Spock, give you birth?



Sheryl Peterson

W7G77MARE

by
Linda Spencer

Diplomatic functions! Kirk thought glumly whilst continuing to nod pleasantly in response to Ambassador Tarquill's flow of inane chatter, taking time to allow his eyes to search the room for his First Officer...

There! Spock was apparently succumbing to the same temptation and was himself involved in the same discreet search, having been appropriated by a small, wiry humanoid wearing the insignia of the Federation Diplomatic Service.

Poor Spock! Kirk thought feelingly; their eyes met ruefully, and Kirk raised his glass slightly in a surreptitious toast. The sleek head inclined in response as Spock accepted a glass of wine from his diminutive companion, answering his Captain's toast.

The smile in Kirk's eyes turned to sudden fear, and before the delicate glass slipped from the Vulcan's hand, shattering into a myriad reflecting fragments, Kirk was moving. Spock crumpled soundlessly, a spasm of crippling pain frozen on the unconscious features.

A few seconds after Kirk reached his friend he was joined by McCoy. The doctor acted swiftly, checked the still body, then - to Kirk's horror - began artificial respiration, cursing the lack of his medikit. Kirk, moving mechanically, his mind stunned, routine alone causing it to function automatically, took out his communicator.

"Kirk to Enterprise."

"Enterprise. Uhura here."

"Uhura, be ready to beam up three - and alert Sickbay. Have them ready with... full... Vulcan life support."

There was an infinitesimal pause. "Aye, sir," came the faint reply.

"Jim." McCoy gently touched his friend's shoulder.

Slowly the golden head raised itself from the nerveless hand which Kirk still gripped tightly.

"He'll make it, Jim. He's in shock... but he *will* make it. There was a total paralysis of the major organs of the thoracic and abdominal cavities, due to the presence in his bloodstream of a drug toxic to Vulcans, little known, however, on Federation worlds. Renaxin... it makes Humans... a little high, makes them act a little more erratically than normal, that's all. But to a Vulcan... it can be fatal, if a counter-agent isn't administered in time. *Very* quick-acting, too," he mused to himself.

Kirk gripped the hand even more tightly, his eyes never leaving the Vulcan's face. "Bones... are you *sure* he really is...?"

"Jim, I swear to you, he'll be fine." The doctor paused, looking down at his patient thoughtfully. "He'll have a pretty rough time of it while the remainder of the toxic substances work themselves out of his system, and he may be subject to hallucinatory delirium... but he *will* be all right, I guarantee it."

Kirk nodded and, suddenly weary, became unnaturally silent. McCoy relaxed, patted the broad shoulder once again, and quietly withdrew.

Alone once more, Kirk shut his eyes against the sickly harsh glare of Sickbay and against the tears which nevertheless seeped from beneath the tightly-closed lids.

"Thank God," he murmured. "I thought I'd lost you, Spock. This time I thought..." He bent his head. "Thank God," he repeated, grateful for his solitude and McCoy's understanding.

Within his nightmare Spock was thrust, armed with a vicious double-edged sword, into an arena.

Jim! he thought, frantic, remembering nothing but darkness.
Where's Jim?

His unspoken question was soon answered. To his intense relief, Kirk, also armed, was pushed into the centre of the arena by an unseen force.

"Spock!" he cried hurriedly, crossing to his friend. "What's going on? I remember beaming down to this godforsaken planet, then... nothing - until now."

Spock looked about him, nodding in response. "I too am having difficulty in recalling the events which brought us here - wherever 'here' is."

Here is the Place of Understanding, Vulcan! a voice boomed out of the darkness.

"Who are you? Show yourself!" Kirk commanded, never impressed by attempts to disconcert him.

We are Seekers. Long ago we searched the outer void which you now seek; now we would search into that darker void which you Humans call... Soul. We would understand this Soul. We have seen your capacity to hate, to fear, in your minds where the history of both your races is stored. In your minds we also touched another... capacity... and that which we would have thought to be called weakness by beings such as you is seen as stronger than all else. We would... understand that which you call love - its strengths and its weakness.

"How can we help you understand?" Kirk asked, wondering how he could play for time. The swords in their hands did not argue peaceful debate with whoever or whatever their captors were. "You can't teach love with violence - why these weapons?"

Observe, Captain Kirk.

The blackness at one end of the arena dissolved into a swirling maelstrom of multicoloured light, finally resolving into a vision of

unimaginable horror. Kirk cried out involuntarily as he witnessed the agony of Spock's suffering and death. Spock's hands trembled around the hilt of his weapon as he beheld the planned fate of his beloved Captain. *Jim must be spared that*, he vowed.

Each of you has seen the other's death; but one of you could be saved from such a death and die quickly at the hands of a friend. Is this 'love' your minds claim you bear for each other sufficient to take a life so precious, to save him from a worse death?

"We will not fight." Kirk threw down his weapon and stood defiantly, challengingly. There was a way out - the thought was in the look he exchanged with Spock. The Vulcan sighed inwardly.

There is no escape... but if you do not begin to fight when you are so instructed, then that fate awaits you BOTH. We have not known the restrictions of love, as we have not known its rewards. That is why we would learn, understand more of it - from you.

Kirk moved forward, spreading his hands appealingly. "But... if you have sought answers in our minds, surely you know that love does not express itself through fighting or struggle, or causing others to do so. It is a creative, not a destructive force - it is not expressed by pain."

It does, however, express itself in sacrifice. If we are to know more of this 'love' we must observe. We would know if this love will make the complete sacrifice - to kill one whom you love, against all laws, all beliefs, all instinct, to save that one from a death of intense pain which you would accept in his place. If indeed love would produce such a reaction, it is indeed stronger than all else, and we would learn more of it.

"Then learn of love now... learn of compassion..."

Kirk... we are incapable of understanding fully these concepts. That is why we would employ you in our experiment. Disagree once again and we will take your friend now. You are suitable for our purpose, but there ARE others. Decide now - or see the Vulcan pay the price.

"No! No... wait, please." Kirk swallowed; no communicators, no sign of a way out, no hope of outside help. He turned to Spock, speaking in an undertone.

"Spock... we'll have to convince them we're fighting. Maybe if we play for time..."

Do not presume to deceive, Kirk, the voice echoed. We are aware of your every thought. Attempt deception once more and there will be pain beyond imagining for the Vulcan... while you watch. Do not hope, either, for escape. You are surrounded by a totally impenetrable force field in a dimension beyond the detection of your ship's sensors. There IS no escape. Accept.

Kirk regarded his friend in despair. How he hated that word, 'Accept'. But he couldn't risk it. Stooping, he picked up the sword. Now, of all times, he *must* be swifter than Spock. But he had to speak first... perhaps time to say farewell... forgive...

"Spock, I... I... think maybe..."

The Human got no further. Strong arms seized him, held him close captive; he saw long fingers go to his neck for a killing grip.

"Spock, no..."

Kirk understood as he heard the Vulcan's ragged, whispered, "Forgive me."

In desperation he attempted to struggle free, then failing that shouted, "No!... I don't want to die by your hand!" He let terror thread his voice.

It worked. He felt the fingers loosen in shock and seized his opportunity, plunging the sword into his friend. He caught him as he slumped forward, sobbing as he held him close.

"Spock... forgive me... forgive my selfishness. I... couldn't lose you like that... Forgive me."

A hand touched his face fleetingly, then the Vulcan shuddered and lay still, his one thought that he had failed Jim... and of the price his friend would pay.

"Spock! Spock! Come out of it!"

Drawing back his hand, Kirk slapped Spock with all his strength, which for a Human was considerable. The healing trance had never been so hard to break - it was as though Spock was trapped in his own mind.

In his own mind... Kirk seized on that thought, and taking the Vulcan's hand, guided it to his own temple.

Deep within the darkness Spock stirred as he sensed the warmth... his warmth. But how? Jim was surely... dead by now, like himself... Were they at least to be allowed this touch before oblivion?

But no - there was not the touch of death here. Tentatively, he reached out with his own mind, felt the warmth snatch at him, hold him possessively, pull him, enclose him, as it dispelled the darkness.

"Spock!" Kirk's voice broke on the name in his relief as the dark eyes fluttered open to regard him in confusion. "Spock... are you all right?" He frowned in worry as the Vulcan fingers trembled within his grasp.

"Alive... You are alive, Jim... A dream, then? A nightmare," he amended, almost to himself. He looked again at Kirk, drank in the living warmth of those eyes, shuddering as he remembered the dream - a patchwork of past horrors and ever-present fears... so unreal in retrospect, yet... too vivid.

"Someone drugged you, Spock," Kirk told him gently. "Renaxin... We found it was some crazy kid, Ambassador Rienka's son, who had nothing better to do... He wanted to 'liven up' the conference, he said... and apparently bring attention to some obscure old grievance his planet has against the Federation. He didn't know it was dangerous to Vulcans - just wanted to make the politicians a little high, cause disruption... Unfortunately for him and for you, you were affected by it immediately, whereas the rest of us... Anyway, you spoiled his little plan by alerting everybody that something was wrong. Damn fool, playing round with drugs!" Kirk's mouth tightened. "Anyway, he's now a 'guest' of Federation Security on the Starbase pending further action, *despite* his father. Good thing he *is* under arrest - if I'd got to him..." Kirk's anger flared in the amber eyes.

McCoy judged it now time to intervene. "Jim, if you'll stop

bending those pointed ears with your party gossip, I'll check my patient, if you don't mind."

McCoy fussed around the Vulcan for a few moments, then grunted. "Hmmm... well... physically you're okay, but you'll stay in Sickbay for observation at least - at the risk of *my* sanity." He waited for the expected cutting response, and was concerned on receiving no reply. He glanced worriedly at Kirk, then nodded slightly towards Spock, his blue eyes eloquent.

"Well... I've got other patients - and reports - to sort out. Not too long, Jim - he needs rest." He left the two together.

Kirk leaned forward, touching the tense face. "Spock, what is it? What's wrong?"

Spock shook his head slightly, as though to clear it. "I... had a nightmare, Jim." The Vulcan looked almost embarrassed, but the slender hands still trembled, recalling.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Kirk asked him gently.

His friend nodded, then slowly, haltingly, related the events of the nightmare he had just lived through.

"God, Spock..." Kirk's eyes closed for a moment as he realised what the Vulcan must have gone through. Renaxin, McCoy had told him, often produced particularly vivid hallucinations when used on Vulcans, and as a result was one of the very rare drugs to be successfully employed for interrogation purposes by the Klingons, who had a busy trade in such rare, illegal drugs with the Orions.

Impetuously he pulled his friend into his arms and held him in silence. The contact seemed to be more effective than mere words as the stiff shoulders gradually relaxed.

"Thank you, Jim," came the muffled voice; then, pulling away slightly, Spock announced in his normal tone, "I am recovered." The frozen fear was replaced now by the customary controlled calm. The dark eyes also had lost that horrified intentness, and quietly regarded Kirk with warm, unashamed affection.

Kirk smiled, gently pushing him back against the pillows. "Come on now. You must sleep."

He caught a swiftly-veiled glimmer of fear at the mention of sleep, the dark, dreams.

"Don't worry... I'm here. I'll stay while you sleep."

Not trusting himself to speak, Spock nodded and settled back obediently as Kirk held his hand in a firm, reassuring grip.

At last Spock's breathing assumed the regularity of normal healthy sleep, a deep, dreamless sleep. Kirk smiled down into the quiet face. On the coming shore leave he was going to see to it that his friend forgot all his nightmares.

"You're going to enjoy this shore leave, Spock," he sternly addressed the sleeping figure; then he grinned. "Whether you like it or not!"



VACATION



by



Janice Pitkethley

As the Earth shuttle descended Spock looked out of the window, watching the passing landscape below. This was his first visit to Earth in seven years. He was travelling to stay with his grandparents, Charles and Elizabeth Grayson. It had been a long time since he had last seen them; he was only eight then, now he was fifteen.

Growing up had been a very painful experience for Spock, due to his Human half. It battled continuously with his Vulcan side, trying to force through illogical feelings and weird emotions, most of which he did not understand how to cope with. For the past year this had been going on, and the eternal struggle to keep his Human half under control had changed Spock, making him silent and withdrawn. Sarek did not understand what his son was going through. Then Amanda had suggested that he should take a vacation on Earth, and so here he was, about to land at the spaceport.

Charles and Elizabeth Grayson were not too sure if this tall Vulcan youth was indeed their grandson. However, he was the only Vulcan among the arriving passengers, so it had to be him.

"Welcome, Spock." Charles Grayson knew how to deal with Vulcans by now. "It is good you should come to visit us. Our home is yours. We hardly recognised you at first."

"Your cousins Dave and Gary are anxious to see you," Elizabeth added. "They will take you around on this vacation."

"I remember my cousins," Spock replied, thinking of the last visit. Dave and Gary had teased him all the time, so much so that he was glad to get back home to Vulcan.

Their meeting did not take place until the following day. Dave and Gary arrived in the morning - Charles Grayson had refused to let them come round the first night as Spock probably needed time to settle down after the long journey from Vulcan.

"Hi, Gran!" Dave breezed through the doorway. "Where's our Vulcan cousin?" he asked, looking around. "Isn't he up yet?"

"Yes, I heard him moving around. Spock... Dave and Gary have arrived," she shouted upstairs.

"Well... uh... Hi!" Dave was lost for words as Spock entered.

"Gee, you're tall," Gary added. "And you're younger than Dave."

"All right, you have plenty of time to talk." Elizabeth busied herself with the breakfast things. "Spock, I forgot to ask you what Vulcans eat in the morning, so I have made several dishes. Would you

guys like a cup of coffee? C'mon, sit down."

Conversation was slow at first as the boys tried to find things to say to this serious-faced Vulcan. They had a feeling this was going to be some vacation! Then Dave started with, "Do you remember?" He talked about the last time they had seen each other.

"We were only kids then. I remember we made fun of you a lot..."

"Yes." Gary took up the story. "Dave went too far one time and you hit him, knocking him halfway across the room."

"I remember that." Spock raised one eyebrow.

"I never tried it again. Wow! You could sure pack a punch," Dave grinned. "I think I smashed into a cabinet or something and broke it. Was Mom mad..."

The boys laughed, thinking over the episode from their childhood.

"What are you going to do today?" Elizabeth asked, refilling their coffee cups and setting out more orange juice for Spock.

"Uh... Well, I thought we might go to the beach. You can swim, Spock?"

"Yes. My father taught me when I was very young," Spock replied. "Vulcan has no oceans."

Elizabeth overheard. "You could take the aircar and go to the coast. It would only take a couple of hours."

"Great, we'll do that." Dave was all for the idea.

"I have no outfit for swimming. It is not a much practiced sport on Vulcan."

"Who cares? We have plenty of swim gear. There should be something to fit you among our stuff."

They set out in the aircar, the journey time from Minneapolis to the Californian coast only taking a little over two hours.

"You would be too cold at the east coast, although it's the nearest," Gary explained. "Look, there's the ocean in the distance."

As the aircar came lower Spock could see the wide blue expanse of the Pacific Ocean. It looked so strange, all that water, after leaving Vulcan's hot dry sands.

Dave and Gary led the way to the white sandy beach. They ran laughing over the beach and dived into the foaming waves while Spock stood shivering at the water's edge.

"Come on, it's not *that* cold," Dave encouraged, floating on his back.

Once the initial shock was over Spock found it quite pleasant, especially the strong waves which crashed to shore.

"Let's have a race," Gary suggested. "As far as the lifeguard

tower. Whoever is last has to buy lunch, okay?"

"Yes," Spock agreed.

"Here we go..." Dave yelled, striking out.

Spock won easily, Vulcan strength making him a powerful swimmer. He reached the tower a good three minutes before the other two.

"That was fast. Where did you learn to swim like that, Spock?"

"It's his strength. Guess I have to buy lunch, then? I was last," Gary said.

They went into a little restaurant before returning to the aircar. Spock didn't know the items on the menu, and the boys had to help him.

"Don't you get tired of all that salad stuff?" Dave asked, eyeing his plate.

"This is different from Vulcan."

On the way back home Dave and Gary began telling funny stories and jokes, some of them a bit rude...

"Well, there was this guy..." Gary started another one. Both brothers roared with laughter at the ending. Spock remained silent, just looking at them, his expression unchanged.

"What d'ya think of that one, eh?" Gary nudged him with his elbow. "Saucy, eh?"

"I do not understand it," Spock replied.

"Aw, who's kidding who? Vulcans can't be that thick!"

"Tell him, Gary."

Gary did so, going into great detail; they thought this was funny.

"How about telling us a Vulcan joke?"

"We have none. It is illogical."

"Then tell us about Vulcans. You know..." He winked at Dave.

Spock shook his head. "I cannot speak as you do."

"What's the big secret, then? Can't you tell us? I have always wondered..."

Spock looked astonished at Gary's nerve and outspoken manner. Finally Dave came to the rescue.

"Stop it, Gary! Vulcans have different ideas from us. Shut up!"

"Sorry," Gary apologised. "How did you like the ocean?" he asked, changing the subject.

"It was cold, but pleasant."

"Maybe we'll do it again before you go home." Dave stopped the aircar at the Graysons' house. "We'll be round for you at seven - we're

going out tonight."

The boys left for their own home across town.

Charles and Elizabeth Grayson asked Spock about the trip to the ocean. They were secretly relieved that the boys seemed to be getting on well with Spock - they had been worried at first when the message came to tell them that Spock was coming to Earth alone. Dave and Gary had changed a lot, for the better.

"Did they say where they are taking you tonight?"

"I do not know."

Spock was ready and waiting when the boys arrived. They were dressed for going out, and stared in appreciation at Spock's outfit of silver and blue.

"Wow! I'm coming to Vulcan next time I need a new outfit," Dave remarked, looking at the tall, slim Vulcan. "We don't stand a chance with *him* around."

Elizabeth overheard their remarks and asked where they were going. She looked a bit concerned when they told her. 'Galactic Vibrations' was a trendy disco-type scene where all the young people met.

"Are you sure it's a suitable place to take a Vulcan?" she asked.

"It's okay, Gran. All the gang will be there, and they all want to meet Spock."

That's what I'm afraid of, she thought to herself as they left.

The volume of noise battered at Spock's sensitive ears when they entered 'Vibrations'. It was supposed to be music, but he could not recognise it as such. The thumping beat drowned all other sounds. The boys waved to some of their friends, and a crowd of boys and girls came over to their table. Fortunately the music stopped then, and they were able to hear what was being said.

"This is our cousin from Vulcan," Dave introduced him.

"Hi! We've been hearing a lot about you..."

"Do you like it here?"

"What is Vulcan like?"

The questions went on and on, as the crowd looked at Spock, taking in the differences - his ears, his skin, his eyes and upswept brows. He answered their questions and watched as the beat started again and couples drifted off to a small clear area.

This was interesting. What illogical event was happening now? Spock watched as they danced; he had heard of this Earth custom, but had never seen it before.

Illogical! They look ridiculous moving around like that, he thought.

A voice interrupted his thoughts. "Do you dance where you come from?" it asked.

Spock turned to see one of the girls sitting beside him. "We do not," he answered.

"I can teach you..."

Spock refused, politely but firmly. The girl did not ask again, but stayed there to talk to him until the others returned.

"Tell me about Vulcan." She rested her chin on one hand, staring into the dark eyes.

"What do you wish to know?"

"Oh... anything. Just tell me about it."

Spock began to describe his home planet. He stopped suddenly and jerked his head away as a hand touched his left ear.

"Stop that!" His voice was icy cold now. "Do not touch me."

"I... I'm sorry," the girl apologised. "I've never seen anyone like you before, and... well, you are different."

"What did I tell you?" Gary announced as they returned to the table. "Leave Spock for five minutes and already he has a girl hanging on to every word."

"C'mon, let's go and get something to eat - I'm starved."

They returned with the 'Vibrations' special, Chinese style. Spock looked at it suspiciously.

"What is it?"

"It's an Oriental dish of rice and vegetables - it's good."

"But there's meat in it," Gary whispered to Dave.

"Ssh! I couldn't get anything else. He won't know the difference if you just keep your big mouth shut."

Spock left more than half of it, and pushed the plate away.

"Don't you like it?" Dave asked.

"It is strange. I cannot take any more."

"That's okay. We probably wouldn't like the Vulcan food we got." Gary returned the plates.

"C'mon, Linda." Dave pulled the girl who had been talking to Spock onto the dance floor.

"Your cousin is nice, but I... must have done something wrong..."

"Huh? What did you say or do?" Dave looked astonished.

"I touched him, and he reacted as if I had scalded him."

Dave couldn't answer at first for laughing. "Look, Linda, forget

it. You'd have a better chance of melting an iceberg with a candle. Don't touch him again. Vulcans hate that."

"They sure are different..." Linda said regretfully.

"Look at *that*." Dave indicated the girls all crowding round the table. "Guess there must be something about our Vulcan cousin..."

They left the floor as the music stopped, Dave throwing himself into the nearest chair. "Well now, I see you're not bored," he teased. "What were you talking about? Vulcan logic? Come on, girls - scat! Give us some breathing space."

Somewhat reluctantly, the crowd of girls moved away.

"Do you like it here?" Dave asked.

"It is... interesting. I have only read about places like this."

They talked for a while, Spock watching as Dave and Gary danced with different girls. The loud heavy rock music seemed to get noisier, hammering through his head like a drumbeat. The air grew hot and stuffy as more people crowded in.

Dave and Gary returned to the table. "It's too bad you can't dance... Hey, are you okay?" Gary asked, noticing Spock's increasing pallor - or was it due to the weird lighting effects?

"It is too crowded. I need air."

"Come on, I'll go with you." Dave rose to his feet. "Guess we forgot you're not used to this." They received a few stares as they tried to get through the crowds of people, Dave leading the way.

"What's wrong?" he asked as they left the crowds and the music. "Here, let me get you a drink of water..."

"I feel ill..." Spock reached for the nearest chair, covering his eyes with one hand.

Dave did not know what to do. He tried unsuccessfully to get Spock to take a drink of water. If his cousin were Human he could have offered help and advice, but a Vulcan...

"I think we'd better get home. I'll get Gary and..."

"Yes, but not at this precise moment. I am... unable to travel," Spock interrupted, rising unsteadily to his feet, his face now drained of all colour.

"Okay, I'll wait until you feel better." Dave looked concerned as his cousin left. Then he realised. "That Chinese meal! Oh no - what have we done?" He went in search of Gary and dragged him away from the girl he was dancing with.

"What's going on?" Gary looked annoyed.

"Call home and get Grandpa to come out with the aircar. Spock doesn't feel so good, and he knows Vulcans better than either of us. We can't walk home, that's for sure."

"Where is he?"

"I left him on the roof. Don't talk stupid, Gary. Go and make that call."

Gary did as he was told, getting through to the Graysons' house. As expected, Charles Grayson was very angry when he heard the story.

"I'll be over right away. Of all the stupid things to do..."

The doorman tried to refuse admission to Charles Grayson when he stopped the aircar outside 'Vibrations', then saluted when Charles showed his official card.

"Sorry, sir. I didn't realise."

The young crowd made way for Charles Grayson, staring curiously as he passed. "I'll bet he's a cop or something," someone remarked.

Dave and Gary were never so glad to see anyone in all their lives as Charles walked through the door.

"I hope you're proud of yourselves! Where is Spock?"

Dave indicated, worriedly. "We knew it was no use asking the first-aid guy for help - that's why we sent for you."

"... and we can't get Spock to answer us," Gary added.

"Maybe he can't." Charles Grayson looked worried himself now. "Spock, it's me, Charles Grayson."

Silence. He tried again, calling Spock's name with no response.

"Hell!" he swore to himself. "Stand back..."

Charles was a powerful, well-built man. He charged at the door with his shoulder. One blow was enough as it gave way with a splintering crash.

"Oh God! I'll kill those two..."

Spock was sitting on the floor, eyes closed. Charles lifted his head and tried to bring him round. A minute or so passed before there was any response.

"Grandfather? How did you get here?" Spock sounded confused and a bit surprised to see his grandfather kneeling on the floor beside him.

"How did you get here and into this state, I should ask? What happened? Did you fall?"

"I do not know."

"Sounds as if you passed out. Come on, I'll help you. Hold on to me."

Charles assisted Spock to his feet. Dave and Gary stared as he walked forward with unsteady steps. They left the 'Vibrations' by a side exit, avoiding the crowds. Charles explained to the doorman about having to cause the damage to the door by smashing it down.

"You had no other choice, sir. I will report the matter to my superiors."

Spock was ill again in the aircar going home. On arrival Charles took him to his room, instructing Elizabeth to call the doctor.

"Take off that suit," he ordered Spock.

"Grandfather... I am causing you much trouble."

"Nonsense. You could not help what happened." Charles looked at the white face on the pillow, then went to meet the doctor, explaining that the patient was Vulcan.

The doctor listened carefully to the story, and then made his diagnosis. The strange food was to blame.

"I advise rest." The doctor was reluctant to give Spock any drugs which could perhaps harm a Vulcan. "If there is no improvement by tomorrow, call me at once."

"Try and get some sleep," Charles said to Spock, then left to see the doctor out. He marched into the room where Dave and Gary waited nervously. By the look on his face they knew he was very angry.

"Of all the stupid, foolish things to do," he began. "Why did you give Spock Chinese food? Some of us can't even eat it, never mind a Vulcan."

"We... uh... never realised what it would do. We are sorry, Grandpa."

"Sorry? You're a bit late for that now. Go home, the pair of you."

"What a night!" Gary remarked as they walked home.

"Yeah. I was with him. I got a real fright, I can tell you. I've never felt so helpless in all my life - I didn't know what to do."

Charles Grayson stayed home from the office for a few days. Most of the time he spent in Spock's room. They talked a lot, and discussed many different things while Spock rested and slowly recovered. Only on the third day could he be persuaded to eat anything.

"You have visitors," Elizabeth informed him as he came downstairs for the first time. Dave and Gary sat there in embarrassed silence, not knowing what to say.

"Uh... Hi!" Dave finally managed to get his voice back. "Look, we're sorry we..."

"Apologies are not necessary." Spock stopped him from going any further. "The incident is past now."

They spent the evening at the boys' house, Dave and Gary showing him all their things. Both were keen sportsmen, but Spock was more interested in the contents of the bookcase and the video-library.

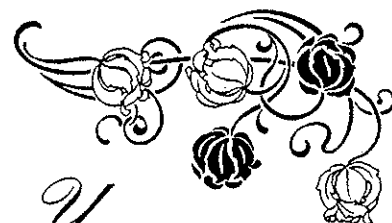
Without thinking Gary put a rock music tape onto the player; a noisy group appeared on the screen, and the loud beat filled the room.

"Please... turn it off." Spock's hands covered his ears.

"Sorry, I forgot." Gary switched it off immediately.

They made plans for the following day, discussing at great length what they would do. It was a busy schedule for the rest of the vacation. Dave and Gary took Spock to their college and school respectively, and all round the places of interest in the Minneapolis area. They visited the ocean again, and went on a three-day camping trip in the mountains. Nights were the problem, as Charles Grayson forbade them to take Spock anywhere unsuitable like 'Vibrations'; usually they stayed home.

The vacation had done what Amanda had hoped it would. Spock changed back to his usual self in the company of his cousins. They spoke openly, helping him come to terms with his Human half. The struggle to keep it subdued was lessened now, and once more the Vulcan side dominated his life. It was a different Spock who returned to Vulcan and home...



If Ever I Would Leave You...

(With sincere apologies to Alan Jay Lerner, librettist of 'Camelot')

If ever I would leave you
It wouldn't be in starflight;
Knowing how in starflight you sing for me so;
Your hull sparkling in starlight,
Warp tubes red with flame;
As you streak through star clusters
All salute your proud name.

But, if I'd ever leave you
It couldn't be in sunlight;
Seeing you in sunlight I never could go.
I've seen how you sparkle
When sunlight kisses your rim;
My eyes drink of your beauty;
My heart fills to the brim.

And should I leave you to walk on planets deep with snow;
I long to return to be embraced by your warm glow.

If ever I would leave you
It couldn't be in earthlight
Knowing how in earthlight
You shine for me so.

Oh, no, not in earthlight;
Stars and galaxies may fall
But never could I leave you, at all.
No, never could I leave you
At all.

Linda C. Wood



The Caverns of Wisdom

by

Janice Pitkethley

The setting sun cast its last rays across the black peaks as Spock reached his destination high in the L-langon mountains. For three days he had travelled across the Sas-a-Shar desert, journeying towards the Temple of Sho-Lan.

The buildings dated back to the Time of the Beginning, and were now occupied by the Vulcan Masters and wise Elders. Spock looked at the ancient fortress surrounded by the high peaks of the L-langon range. His presence here was part of the Kahs-lak, the Vulcan test of endurance and strength, signifying his entry into adulthood. His eighteenth birthday would be in a few weeks time, and before the official ceremony of Kahs-lak he had to spend some time with the Elders.

"Welcome, Spock, son of Sarek," the Elder greeted him fingers parted in the Vulcan salute.

Spock returned the sign, and followed the Elder through the stone passages of the old fortress.

"This will be your room during your visit with us." The Elder pushed open a heavy wooden door.

Spock glanced around his new abode. The room was dark, almost cell-like, the only illumination coming from a slit window high up on the far wall. Both walls and floor were hard stone, devoid of any covering.

"You will attend to matters of hygiene then rest after your journey," the Elder instructed him. "I am your appointed Guide and Counsellor. I am called Senlar. Rest until morning, Spock." He gave the hand sign and withdrew. The door closed with a heavy resounding clang.

The room had only the bare essentials. The bed was wooden, and very hard. Laid out on it were a saffron-coloured robe and a pair of sandals. Spock shivered as he removed the dusty desert suit - nights were very cold at this altitude. He surveyed the primitive facilities with something close to dismay; the stand in one corner held a container and a pitcher of freezing cold water.

Making the best of the situation he washed and changed into the saffron robe. Sleep was a long time in coming; the couch was hard and unyielding, and the one blanket did not provide much warmth in the chilling mountain air. It seemed as if hours had passed before he descended into a fitful sleep.

The deep booming of gongs woke him instantly. Grey light was filtering through the tiny window. His wrist chronometer read six a.m. The morning air felt colder than ever, and he soon discovered the water

in the pitcher and container was covered by a thin layer of ice. Shivering, he waited for the arrival of his Guide.

Senlar opened the door and glanced around the tidy room, noting that Spock had folded the blanket on the bed and stowed away his few possessions.

"That is good - some of my charges have not been tidy." Senlar gave the hand sign. "I trust you slept well?"

"Sleep eluded me for many hours," Spock confessed, returning the greeting.

"That is to be expected. The surroundings are unfamiliar to you." He indicated the pitcher and container. "Come - you must be prepared to be self-sufficient here."

Spock did as he was told and followed the Elder down the dark passageway. His eyebrows almost vanished into his hairline as Senlar showed him into another room. It too had never been touched since ancient times. In the middle of the floor stood the gaping mouth of a well, and the sound of rushing water could be heard far below. Obviously the Elders did not believe in carrying out any modernisation process to the ancient fortress.

Senlar showed him how to lower the pitcher into the dark depths and carefully bring it to the surface again. Spock accidentally spilled some water, and it numbed his hands with its icy coldness.

"There is an underground spring from a melting glacier," Senlar explained in answer to his questioning look. "It gives the only water supply to the Sho-Lan. You will soon become accustomed to life here."

Spock privately doubted the statement as he followed his Guide once more. They arrived at a large area where meals were taken. Several other young Vulcans sat at a long table. Spock joined them, and Senlar went over to sit beside the rest of the Elders.

The young Vulcan males looked at the newcomer; all were in the same age group, and were here for the same purpose.

"Did you arrive last night?" one of them asked.

"Yes. I am called Spock."

"I am Satar," the Vulcan introduced himself, and then the others.

The meal was simple and plain; the Elders grew all their own produce in the gardens at the rear of the Sho-Lan.

"I think I have seen you before." Satar looked at Spock. "You are the son of Sarek?"

"That is correct. What takes place here?" Spock asked.

"You will be given a lot of time to spend in meditation, and your Guide will instruct you further in the teachings of Surak and the meaning of IDIC. Then we are allotted some duties to carry out - work normally done by the Elders."

"What do you think of the conditions in this place?" someone else asked.

"I did not believe conditions like this existed on Vulcan," Spock replied. "We are living in the manner of the Ancient Vulcans."

"The Elders are accustomed to the conditions, but I cannot sleep at night for the cold." Satar raised one eyebrow.

"The water in the pitcher was frozen this morning. I had to break it to wash." Spock shivered at the memory.

The arrival of the Elders put an end to their discussion, each student following his Guide.

"We shall meet later," Satar said in a low voice as he left the table.

The morning was spent in a series of lectures on the philosophies of Surak, then the Elder sent Spock to his room for a period of private meditation. The 'meditation' did not take place; Spock sat down on the floor, steeped his fingers - and promptly fell asleep. He jerked awake at the sound of approaching footsteps, the afternoon far advanced.

"You are free to do what you wish for the rest of the evening." Senlar stood in the doorway.

Hoping the Elder had not noticed the signs of sleep in his eyes, Spock nodded in acknowledgement and left the tiny cell-like room. He wanted to go out into the open, away from the oppressive atmosphere of the ancient fortress. By now he knew his way around, and walked towards one of the main doorways.

"Spock..."

He stopped at the sound of a voice calling his name. It was Satar.

"May I accompany you?" Satar asked when he learned Spock's intentions.

"Yes. I welcome your company," Spock replied.

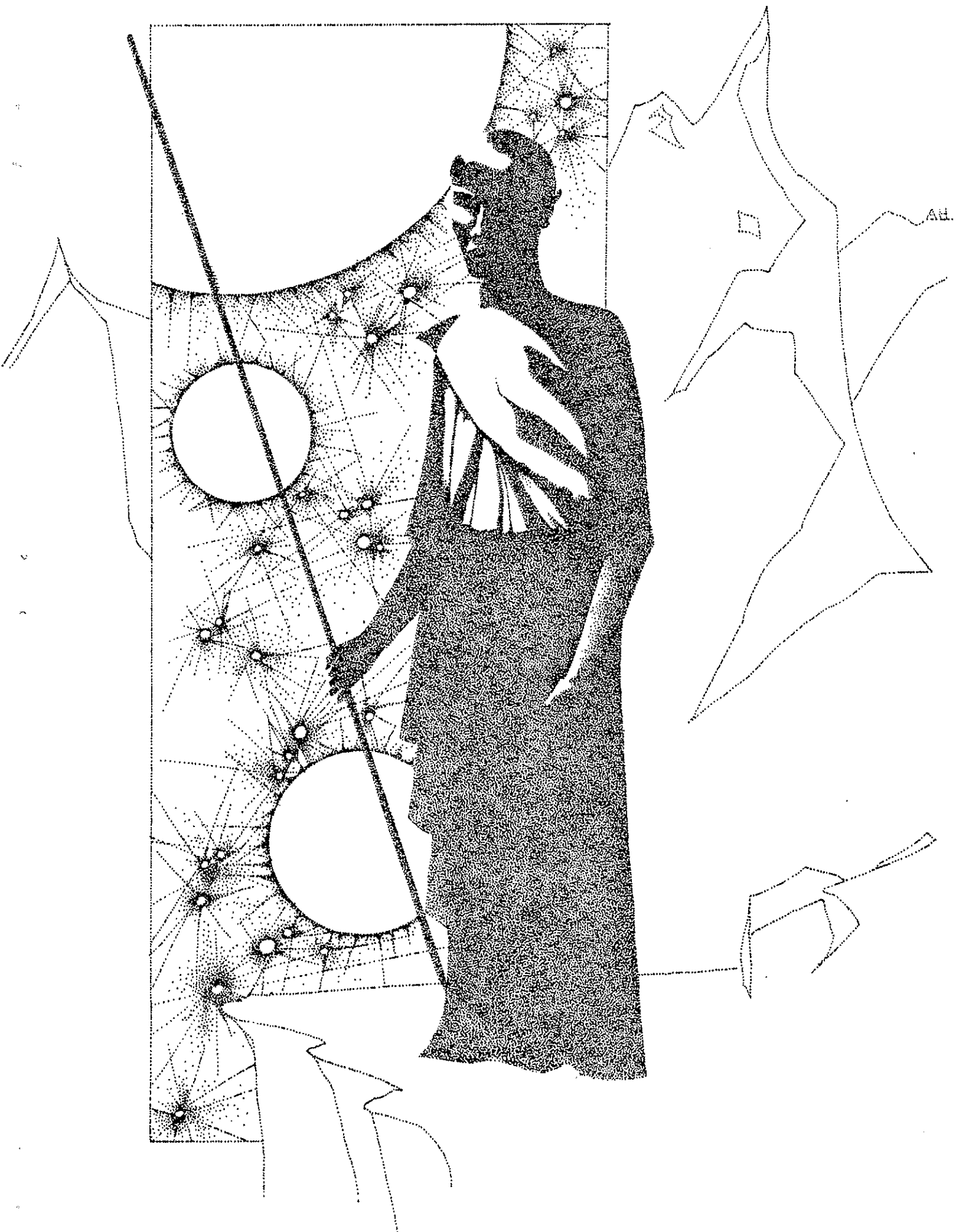
The path grew steeper, climbing upwards. At last they reached a flat plateau high among the mountains. The view was spectacular; far below they could see the Sho-Lan, and in the distance stretched the vast barren sands of the Sas-a-Shar. They watched in silence as the sun slipped below the black peaks and the sky turned bright shades of orange and pink in a beautiful sunset. As the sky darkened pinpoints of light appeared. The Hunter shone the brightest as one by one the stars came out.

"It is beautiful..." Satar gazed up into the rarified atmosphere, the stars seeming even clearer at this altitude.

"Yes..." Spock's voice was hushed as he felt a stirring deep within. "One day I shall travel among the stars."

"What did you say?" Satar asked.

"It is of no importance." Spock was reluctant to reveal his feelings and the warm glow inside him. It was as if he had had a premonition of the future... he now knew that the Vulcan Science Academy held no interest for him. His life was out there...



Spock quickly adapted to life at the Sho-Lan, absorbing all the knowledge and teaching of the wise Elders. A few weeks later the oldest of the Masters sent for him.

"Be seated." The Master gave the hand sign. "We are satisfied with your progress here. You are ready to advance into adulthood. Take this document to your father." The Master handed him a sealed package. "Live long and prosper, Spock, Son of Vulcan. You are free to return to your home."

"Peace and long life, Master." Spock returned the salute and withdrew.

It took him another three days to cross the Sas-a-Shar desert. He mainly slept through the greatest heat of the day, travelling in the cool of the morning and evening, and also at night. In the evening of the third day he passed through the scanners at the entrance to Shi-Kahr. It felt good to be home...

Sarek and Amanda heard the cries of welcome from I-Chaya the sehlat and crossed to the window. "He's back..." Amanda rushed to open the door.

"Welcome, Spock. You have comported yourself with honour," Sarek greeted the dusty travel-stained figure.

Spock handed over the sealed package then asked permission to be excused.

"Certainly. You must attend to matters of hygiene." Sarek looked at the dusty desert suit.

How good it felt to be really clean again after the primitive facilities of the Sho-Lan! In fact, he stayed so long in the shower that Sarek came to see what he was doing.

"The official ceremony of the Kahs-lak will take place three days from now," Sarek informed him later that evening. "I am proud of you, Spock. The Elders were most satisfied with your progress during your stay with them."

"I am honoured, Father," Spock replied.

In the morning of the day the ceremony was to take place Sarek entered Spock's room as he got ready, making sure his son's attire was correct in every detail. Spock wore the traditional Zlitzaben, a black tunic signifying his entry into adulthood. Amanda felt the tears pricking at her eyes as he walked behind Sarek - how tall and dignified he looked, totally Vulcan.

Spock had to conceal a feeling of surprise at the sight of the aircar parked outside the official building they were about to enter. It bore the IDIC symbol.

"Yes, Spock. Senlar, your Guide at the Sho-Lan, has consented to conduct the ceremony of Kahs-lak," Sarek answered his unspoken question.

All the family were assembled, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. They turned to look at Spock as the party made their entrance.

Amanda took her place beside the Vulcan women and watched as Spock stepped forward and stood between Sarek and Senlar. The ceremony was conducted in the Vulcan language, too fast and complicated for her to understand. She felt a rush of emotion and her eyes grew moist with unshed tears as Spock read from the Book of Life and repeated the ancient Laws of Vulcan in a clear, firm voice. He then bent his head and Senlar stepped forward and placed the IDIC around his neck.

"Live long and prosper, Spock of Vulcan." Senlar raised his hand, fingers parted.

"Peace and long life, wise Elder." Spock returned the sign, then turned and gave the salute to his father.

"Vulcan honours you." Sarek also gave the sign, his eyes warm as he looked at his son, the shining IDIC around his neck. "May you always uphold the philosophies of IDIC."

The rest of the family came over to offer their greetings, then departed. Senlar declined the invitation to their home, saying he had to return to the Sho-Lan.

Spock felt no different after the ceremony, accepting the fact that he was now an adult in the eyes of Vulcan society. He was free to make his own decisions, already knowing the direction his life would take.

.....night after night, the stars seemed to beckon.....



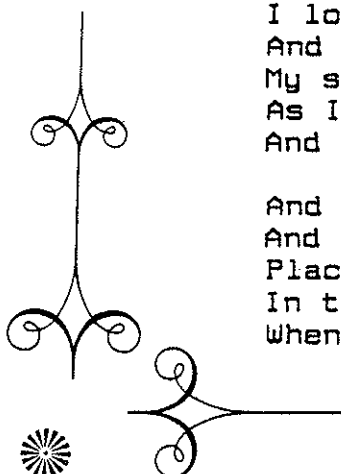
SONG of the STARMAN

Oh, give me a silver starship
And a deck beneath my feet;
My heart will sing
And my soul take wing
As I go, new challenges to meet.

I long to sail among the stars
And walk on an alien shore.
My spirit will fly
As I touch the sky
And I will never ask for more.

And when I meet my destiny,
And I'll be no more the rover,
Place my body to immerse
In the Universe
When the long trick's over.

Linda C. Wood



the BREATH of LIFE



by
Val Kyrie



The turbolift doors to the bridge hissed open and Captain Kirk turned in his command chair, smiling in greeting to his Chief Medical Officer.

"Doctor Leonard McCoy, reporting fit and ready for active duty, Captain."

"I'm very glad to hear that, Bones," Kirk replied, adding lightly, "Maybe now you're quite recovered from the Uians, the flood of transfer requests from Sickbay personnel will finally halt."

"Are you suggesting that I've been other than a model...?"

The doctor's protest was cut off by Lt. Uhura at the Communications console. "I have Mr. Chung on audio, sir."

"Never mind, Bones, routine medical checks on the Nibron project team will be an ideal way for you to return to duty." Kirk indicated to Uhura to put Chung, the project leader, on. "This is Captain James T. Kirk of the USS Enterprise. We'll..."

"Captain Kirk," Chung cut in angrily, "we were told to expect you eight weeks ago. These very unnecessary medical checks were supposed to take place during our summer months."

"I apologise for our unpunctuality, Mr. Chung," Kirk replied in his most diplomatic manner, "but we were held up by a slight problem at our last port of call." Ignoring McCoy's snort at his understatement of the incident, Kirk continued, "Starships, Mr. Chung, are notoriously bad timekeepers."

"Surely, Captain, the Federation must recognise we are too busy preparing for our approaching winter." The voice was emphatic. "We cannot spare our time for non-essential activities."

"The Federation," McCoy broke in, "considers medical checks on all authorised project personnel essential activity, Mr. Chung, and I..."

Kirk held up his hand to silence McCoy. "I'm sorry if our delay impairs your efficiency, but as my Chief Medical Officer states, these checks are considered essential." Persuasively, Kirk added, "Surely a few minutes per person isn't too long to ensure they are fit to survive the Nibron winter?"

"As Federation regulations stand, I appear to have little choice, do I? But I shall log an official protest at your delay. You will be given transportation coordinates, and I warn you, Captain, use these landing sites only. At this time of year there are many freak weather conditions which can be very dangerous to the unwary."

"We'll beam down the medical team within thirty minutes, Mr."

Chung." Kirk broke off communications, sighing. "A little touchy, I thought."

"Mr. Chung is renowned for his 'forceful' personality," Spock explained. "He is a vociferous exponent of the controversial agricultural ecology theory, and is pioneering the cause on Nibron, at the possible expense of his professional reputation."

"Meaning, Spock, he's got an awful lot to lose if anything goes wrong," McCoy dryly translated.

"The Federation has a lot at stake here too, Bones," Kirk added. "With this planet there are still too many unknowns - which we, gentlemen, are here to check out." He stepped down from the command chair, making his way across to the First Officer. "And as your presence on the landing party is not required, Mr. Spock, I want you to find out all you can about these patches of sensory interference that sweep the planet - I want to know their cause and if they present any danger to the project or its members. And *that*," Kirk smiled, "ought to keep you busy until we get back from Nibron's Arctic wastes, where I'm sure," he sighed as the turbolift doors closed, "our welcome from Mr. Chung will be far from warming."

Twenty minutes later Kirk and Sulu, with McCoy and his medical team, materialised at the bottom of a low rocky ridge, which protected three sides of the project compound from the shrieking wind whose icy blasts tore into their bones.

"Chung was right!" McCoy yelled above the wind. "Winter's definitely on its way. No wonder Spock looked relieved when you didn't include him in the landing party."

"A sub-arctic zone is no place for a Vulcan," Kirk agreed. "Or a Human. I wonder where our welcoming committee is."

Sulu directed Kirk's attention to one of the low compound buildings where the tall Asian figure of Chung beckoned to them. Inside the prefabricated building it was not much warmer, but it was a relief to be in out of the wind and into this stark shelter which was Chung's office.

Kirk eyed the room, feeling it mirrored its occupant - cold and uninviting. Although he looked a tower of strength - in build, at least - Chung's surly wariness masked the vulnerability of his position with this project.

Chung regarded them with open suspicion as he motioned Kirk and Sulu to sit at his work desk while he talked with the medical team.

"You will find, Doctor, that all my personnel are fit and healthy and already becoming cold-adapted." He pointed to his assistant. "Patel will show you where you can begin your own examination to verify this."

As the medical team left Chung sat down across the table from Kirk and Sulu. "I believe, Captain, that Federation regulations now require me to report to you of the success of the project so far." At Kirk's nod he continued with obvious relish. "Well, you can tell the cynics that we have had enormous success with the Antiquar plant. It thrives and flourishes as if it were native. Soon we'll be the major exporter of vegetable protein in this section of the galaxy."

"The temperature's certainly cold enough for maximum growth," Sulu agreed wryly.

"We're also interested in anything unusual you've encountered so far," Kirk said levelly. "You spoke of the danger of freak weather conditions."

"Only to the unwary, Captain," Chung explained. "It's merely some sort of low-level electrical storm. It can whip up suddenly, but fortunately it is found in certain areas only. The project compound and fields are quite safe."

"These electrical storms - could they be the cause of this sensory interference which sweeps the planet?"

"I believe the initial survey ship did log some sort of finding to that effect. The Federation did ask us to report anything untoward regarding this, but as I said, the storms never encroach on our area and we do not have the time to chase after the phenomena. As I said before, Captain - non-essential activity." Before Kirk could question him further Chung rose from the table, saying, "If we are finished here you must see the fields, show the Federation something to back my claims."

"Yes," Sulu agreed eagerly. "From what we could see of the fields from the beam-down point, the plant is adapting well to its new home, although we will have to take a few samples for further analysis."

As Chung opened the door to lead them out into the cold once more, Kirk silently cursed Federation regulations for insisting that the senior officer must personally inspect the project. Sulu was quite experienced enough to ensure that everything was in order - in fact, with his interest in botany he was probably *more* qualified - and he was eager to go out into the fields for a closer look at the Antiquar. Kirk silently swore again. Damn plant - why couldn't it prefer a sub-tropical climate?

On board the Enterprise the First Officer was making rapid calculations.

"The field of disturbance is definitely moving towards the project compound, sir," stated Chekov from the Science station, adding, "On its present velocity it will reach the compound in..."

"Fifteen minutes, 45.6 seconds."

"Exactly, Mr. Spock," Chekov agreed.

"Lt. Uhura, inform the landing party that a field of high-density energy is proceeding in their direction, and indications suggest that..."

"I can't reach the landing party, Mr. Spock." Uhura frantically adjusted frequency settings. "It's this sensory interference - it's jamming all signals."

"Field of disturbance now appears to be detouring around the compound, Mr. Spock - 40 North," announced a puzzled Chekov. "But there appears to be another one forming, heading in the same direction."

"We should be able to hail the landing party between waves," Uhura informed them.

"Agreed, Lieutenant, but I don't believe the compound is in any immediate danger." Spock steepled his fingers, deep in thought. "There does seem to be a pattern emerging from this apparently random movement." He left the command chair to confirm his theory against Chekov's readout at the Science station. "Inform the transporter room to stand by, Lieutenant," he directed while he studied the figures. "I should be able to beam down before the next wave of disturbance enters the area - more information on the source of the phenomena should be available on the Nibron surface."

In the transporter room Spock gave the exact coordinates for his transportation. "These, Mr. Kyle, should put me ahead of the energy field by seven point four minutes."

"But sir, Mr. Chung did say rather forcefully that we were to use only the coordinates he gave us," Kyle reminded him.

"Which do not offer the most logical position to observe this energy field, therefore I propose to beam down ahead of the field on the ridge above the compound itself."

Kyle knew better than to argue with the Vulcan First Officer, and transported him down to the requested coordinates.

On the Bridge at the Science console, Chekov announced, "Field now deviating 40 North again."

"Keep a close eye on it, laddie," warned Scotty from the command chair, muttering, "I hope that crazy Vulcan knows what he's doing!"

The subject of his thoughts had shimmered into existence on the high ridge, caught in the clutch of the shrieking wind and in the path of the second wave of energy.

In the project fields, amid the carpet of small white flowers of the Antiquar plant, Kirk and Sulu followed Chung as he illustrated how the plant had adapted to its new climate. At random he uprooted a plant, showing the developing series of underground tubers in which it stored its protein reserve; the protein that Chung and his group would harvest to prove their claim of feeding the multitude was no idle boast.

With an enthusiastic audience in Sulu, Chung had become almost amiable, delighting in explaining the ways in which the project's detractors had been proved wrong. As Sulu and the project leader bent to examine and discuss soil content, Kirk's eyes wandered around the empty settlement and across to the protective ridge. As he watched a figure slowly appeared from the transporter effect.

"Oh, no!" Chung almost whispered, following Kirk's gaze to the figure above them. Suddenly turning on Kirk he shouted, "I warned you no-one was to beam down except to the coordinates I specified. If this is some Federation idea to snoop around behind my back, you've sadly miscalculated, Kirk, and I will not be held responsible. Do you hear me, Kirk? This is your doing, not mine!"

"What do you think he means, Captain?" asked Sulu, perplexed, as Chung stalked off back to the compound.

"I don't know - but there's something wrong here, and I intend to

Find out what."

"Jim! Jim!" McCoy shouted against the wind as he ran from the building that Chung had disappeared into. "What's wrong? Chung suddenly burst in on us saying there was someone on the ridge. The effect on his people was electric. Jim, what's up there that makes them so concerned?"

Before Kirk could reply Sulu drew their attention back to the ridge above them as the figure on the summit slumped to the ground. A sudden icy spasm ran through Kirk as he realised who it was. Spock.

"C'mon!" he ordered as he began to race towards the summit.

"No!" yelled Chung as he ran from the compound, grabbing Kirk by the arm. "Stop. Listen to me, Kirk - there's nothing you can do." He paused, strengthening his hold on Kirk. "Until they've passed it's not safe up there."

"Let go of me!" Kirk ordered darkly. "That's one of my men up there."

"As you wish, Captain, but there's nothing to be done for him," Chung answered, freeing Kirk from his hold.

On the summit the Vulcan lay very still. A breathless McCoy ran a quick medical scan.

"He's alive, Jim, but physical and mental functions are at a very low level. We have to get him back to the ship - and quickly."

"Yes," agreed Kirk, gazing down at the prone body, aware of the strange tingling sensation he had felt since he reached the summit of the ridge. "Kirk to Enterprise. Come in, Enterprise." The communicator in his hand crackled with static. "Come in, Enterprise!" he demanded.

"It's no use, Captain," Sulu reminded him. "The sensory interference is too strong here."

"You must leave the ridge, Captain," said a voice behind them. "They are becoming restless. Bring your officer back to the compound," Chung instructed. "You can't call your ship or be transported from here. They're far too near - can't you feel them?"

"Them?" Kirk queried, clutching Chung's arm, demanding an explanation.

"I can't explain here. We must leave - now!"

The urgent appeal in the man's voice forced Kirk into compliance, and between them they carried the Vulcan down the slope and back to the project complex. Once the call to the ship was through and McCoy and Spock were beamed aboard, Kirk put the worry he felt for the Vulcan to the back of his mind. This time Chung would give him answers.

The project leader, however, had returned to his uncooperative self, firmly denying any knowledge of what might have happened on the ridge except to repeat that they had been warned of beaming down to unauthorised sites, and that it was Kirk's responsibility that Spock had been caught in the storm.

"You call this energy field a 'storm' now, yet on the ridge you

referred to it as 'them', as if it were alive. Which is it, Chung?" Kirk snapped angrily.

Chung sat at his work desk, remaining stubbornly silent. Kirk turned from the project leader to pace the floor in front of him.

"Very well," he said evenly. "Obviously there is some unknown force on this planet which has been proved to be dangerous to life. I therefore have no choice but to evacuate all personnel until this force has been investigated. Get your people ready, Chung - you're all coming back with us to the Enterprise."

"No!" pleaded Chung, leaping from his seat to grab Kirk by the arm. "You must understand how important this project is. For years Nibron has been considered worthless, a cold, barren desert - until I discovered how the soil could be perfected for the Antiquar." He looked Kirk in the eye, continuing persuasively, "If this project is proved a success, we can begin sowing on a full scale. And think of it, Kirk - this planet will provide the protein requirements for this section of the galaxy, and more besides."

"I'm not disputing this planet's potential usefulness, but the presence of this 'force' may make harvesting Antiquar on Nibron too dangerous."

"No, Captain. I've worked too hard on this project to have a mere militarist throw it all away." Chung turned from Kirk, explaining, "I had to push and push at the Council to allow me at least to test my theories here with a project team, and I will not allow you to take away my success because of something you do not understand."

"Then help me to understand, Chung," Kirk urged. "Explain what happened up there on the ridge."

Chung's shoulders slumped as he recognised the inevitable; to explain to Kirk would risk the end of the project, but to remain silent would ensure its closure. He had no choice, really, but to explain.

"The 'storm' or 'force' you spoke of is actually a herd of living beings - almost pure energy. Unfortunately they're not very intelligent, and they are invisible. The only way you know they're approaching is by the excitement in the air. Normally the herds are very small, and coming into contact with them is disorientating but harmless. Unfortunately, Captain, they gather to migrate, and the ridge is part of their migration route. Their paths criss-cross the entire planet, which is why I warned you," he emphasised again, "to beam down only to agreed sites, ones well away from their normal routes."

"That doesn't explain what happened to my First officer," Kirk queried. "Was he attacked?"

"No, Captain," Chung sighed. "He merely got in their way. In small groups they are completely harmless, but a large migrating herd..." He shook his head expressively. "When we first arrived most of us were eventually caught in a herd group. Luckily it was summer here, and the herds were small, but the contact gave us an idea of what they were. They're empathic, with some sort of group consciousness. Those of us who were caught pooled our data and drew up charts of where the herds gather. Unfortunately, there were one or two accidents. Bates and Ortega - they must have been caught in a larger herd. Thoughts and emotions are swamped, Kirk, with a surrendering of will to the herd consciousness. In a relatively small herd one can hold onto one's identity - in a larger migratory herd one loses it altogether."

All that's left is the husk of Human - the mind or spirit is with the herd."

Kirk closed his eyes hard, trying to block out the image of Spock lying on the ridge, the vacant expression and the empty eyes. He tried to control the anger welling up inside him when he turned back to Chung.

"You knew how dangerous this herd was, and yet you continued with the project! The Federation must have been aware of something; how did you get them to agree to this?"

"The Federation knew nothing of the herds' existence. They were only picked up as minimal sensory interference on the sensors. Even so, they were doubtful. The Council wanted checks and investigations," Chung continued wretchedly. "I had a shipment of Antiquar plants ready for sowing. I couldn't afford to be delayed longer, so I persuaded them to pass the mission, and I would monitor the 'interference' and report anything unusual to them."

"You mean," said Kirk, astounded, "you railroaded the Federation into giving this project the go-ahead and then never reported back on what you found out about the herd!"

"They would have shelved my project, sent researchers and bureaucrats to tie up this planet in red tape and fine print. I could not - *would not* - allow that."

"That decision wasn't yours to make, Chung, nor is it mine," Kirk stated firmly. "Your personnel will be evacuated and this matter will be reported to the proper authorities so that this planet and its life-forms can be fully investigated."

"Captain, there is no danger now," Chung pleaded. "We know their routes and paths..."

"And if they change them?" Kirk demanded. "You've invaded their world, Mister; who knows what their reaction may be?"

Kirk's decision proved unpopular with all the Nibron personnel, who protested vehemently that they were quite safe on Nibron. They soon realised argument with the Captain of the Enterprise was useless, and the evacuation proceeded. Kirk's one allowance to the project was to permit the harvest of the first year's crop of Antiquar to be beamed aboard, satisfying them that they would have something substantial to show the Council in their favour.

In Sickbay, Spock's restlessness worried McCoy.

"How long has he been like this, Bones?" Kirk asked.

"It started not long after we beamed up. The problem is, Jim," McCoy confided, "that I don't know whether this is a turn for the worse, or an improvement, although from the little Chung's people have told me, I'd guess it's an improvement. Hopefully, he's fighting back - his life readings are all up, anyway. It may be the further we get from this herd, the greater the improvement." McCoy sighed. "I'm sorry, Jim - there just isn't anything I can really do except wait and see. Perhaps it may need a Vulcan healer to bring him out of this - if it's possible."

Kirk laid a comforting hand on the doctor's shoulder, knowing how frustrated he must feel. Turning from McCoy, he bent over the agitated Vulcan.

"Fight it, Spock, and keep fighting it - that's an order, Mister." He left the bedside for the exit, hoping it wouldn't be the first order Spock had disobeyed, when he heard a voice calling his name.

"Jim?"

"I'm here, Spock. Don't worry - just rest."

McCoy began fussing over his now conscious patient. "About time too, you stubborn Vulcan. We're being turned into a passenger liner, and you're here malingering."

"Negative, Doctor," Spock answered weakly. "I must... return to..."

"Don't you move a muscle, Spock; you don't return to duty until I say so" warned McCoy. "And you," he said, turning to Kirk, "don't you have a ship to run or something?"

Kirk left the Sickbay with a relieved smile that things appeared to be returning to normal. On his way to his quarters to complete his reports he discovered one problem still remained. Chung was waiting for him, still unwilling to accept his project's indefinite postponement.

"Do you really intend returning us to Starbase 4, Captain? Surely we can remain in the area until the Federation makes a definite decision on Nibron's future?"

"Mr. Chung, my orders are quite specific. You and your personnel are to be taken to Starbase 4, while a detailed survey is mounted to begin a thorough exploration of the planet and its life-forms. And until and if that survey mission reports Nibron as safe, you and your project are grounded."

"I will not leave Nibron to my enemies, Captain!" Chung declared. "I am sure you are aware that I am not a popular man among my fellow professionals," he explained gruffly. "Many had thought to see me fail in this project; nevertheless, I have proved to everyone Nibron's worth as an agricultural planet, and I cannot stand by and allow you to give them the opportunity to have the support for my project withdrawn."

"I'm not interested in your backroom politics, Mr. Chung," Kirk answered. "I have my orders. You will return to Starbase 4, either voluntarily or in the brig. It's your choice."

As Kirk ended his argument in the corridor with Chung, McCoy in Sickbay was involved in another with Spock. The doctor had been preparing another sedative when he discovered his patient was already dressing to leave.

"What the devil do you think you're doing, Spock?" he asked, approaching with the filled hypodermic.

"I have recovered sufficiently, Doctor, to no longer need to adopt a prone position," the Vulcan answered patiently. "I intend to return to my quarters, where I can meditate on my experience - something which it is patently impossible to do here."

"Well, I'm still the doctor around here," McCoy said icily, running a mediscan over the waiting Vulcan, "and you don't leave here until I say so."

Spock raised an enquiring eyebrow at the mediscan results.

"Well... yes..." McCoy reluctantly agreed, "you appear fit enough to return to your quarters. *But*," he warned, "that's all. You don't return to duty until I'm satisfied you're fully recovered."

"Of course, Doctor," Spock answered, heading for the door.

"Damn!" McCoy muttered softly as the doors hissed shut, "I *knew* I should have used a stronger sedative the first time."

In his quarters Kirk had been working for the last two hours on the mass of reports he had to complete on the Nibron project and personnel, detailed, cross-referenced and with full exposition of his command decision to evacuate the planet. He knew the reports were necessary, but nevertheless this was one part of a Starship Captain's duties he could well do without. As he tried once more to settle his concentration the desk console beeped.

"Lt. Sulu here, Captain," said the voice. "We've transported aboard the last of the Antiquar harvest. Ready to break orbit."

"Take us out then, Mr. Sulu. Warp factor three," Kirk answered, turning his attention reluctantly back to the reports.

"Captain, no response to helm control," came the voice again. "Manual override inoperative - we're locked in orbit."

Kirk stood up from his desk, the reports forgotten as he snapped his orders. "Get Scotty to bypass computer control at Engineering and get us out of orbit on auxiliary control. I'm on my way."

On the Bridge he was met by the glum news from his Chief Engineer. "Captain, I can't break us out of orbit. Both primary and secondary systems are locked into orbital status."

"Both primary and secondary systems malfunctioning?" Kirk queried suspiciously.

"It's no malfunction," the Scotsman stated. "The systems have been deliberately tampered with, probably through the auxiliary control room."

"How soon can you get control back?"

"Captain, this has been done by a real expert. It'll take hours just to find out where the block's been placed, never mind remove it."

"Then get to it, Mr. Scott, while I have a word with our Mr. Chung!" snapped Kirk, heading for the turbolift.

As he stepped out of the lift and into the corridor Kirk was surprised to be greeted by the sight of his First Officer. The Vulcan was approaching a junction of the corridor; he seemed to hesitate, bewildered at which direction to take. He put a hand to his head as if

trying to remember, then pulled himself up straight, certain of his route. Kirk hesitated for a moment. Did McCoy know his patient was prowling the ship's corridors? Surely he could not have discharged Spock in this disturbed state?

"Mr. Spock," he called after the figure, catching up with the Vulcan, who seemed to falter again before turning to face his Captain.

"Jim?" The voice was remote and doubtful. Spock placed a hand to his temple once more. "Captain," he stated firmly.

Kirk crossed the remaining distance between them instantly, extending an arm to steady the Vulcan. "What's wrong, Spock? I hadn't expected to see you out of Sickbay so soon."

The Vulcan leaned heavily against Kirk. "I was able to persuade the good Doctor my condition had improved. However, I seem to have underestimated the frequency of the periods of disorientation." He paused, looking at Kirk's worried expression. "The period of confusion is passing, Jim; however, I do feel I should return to my quarters before another."

"Yes," Kirk smiled reassuringly. "McCoy predicts you'll feel better once we leave Nibron orbit."

"We are still in orbit?" Spock asked hesitantly.

"Just a small technical hitch," Kirk explained, determined not to worry the Vulcan. "Mr. Scott's working on it, and I think we just might be able to struggle through without you. Just get back to your quarters and rest, or I'll have McCoy take you back to Sickbay," Kirk threatened.

Kirk watched the Vulcan retrace his steps until he was out of sight before making his own way to Chung's quarters. What Kirk did not see, a few minutes later, was the Vulcan slump against the bulkhead, his fingers pressed tightly to his temples, seeming to listen to an inner voice. Slowly he prised himself off the wall, continuing on his original route to the transporter.

In Chung's quarters Kirk again argued, "The only personnel with anything to gain from this delay are your project team."

"Captain Kirk!" the Asian replied angrily, using his height to tower over Kirk. "Neither I nor any of my team have the expert knowledge to disable a Starship in this manner. We are botanists and ecologists. Check our backgrounds, and *then*," he continued, jabbing Kirk in the chest with his finger, "look for your suspect elsewhere."

Before Kirk could reply the console bleeped for attention. "Mr. Kyle here, Captain," said a groggy voice. "Unauthorised use of the transporter, sir. Coordinates are set for the Nibron project area. And," Kyle added, "whoever knocked me cold used what felt like a Vulcan neck pinch."

Kirk, McCoy and Chung materialised on the same coordinates Spock had used minutes earlier. Out of the transporter effect they instantly felt the same charge of excitement in the air as they had previously, when they'd first found Spock - only now the charge in the air was more intense.

"They're coming, Kirk," warned Chung. "We're too close - we've got to get away."

"No," stated Kirk, indicating Spock's approach. Surrounding the Vulcan was a strange, shimmering haze. "Is he melding somehow with the herd?"

"Like Cochrane with the Companion?" McCoy answered.

"Yes, gentlemen," said a voice that was Spock's, yet held a faint echo of more than one voice. "The situation is similar."

"What are you?" Kirk asked, maintaining his distance.

"We are what you call 'the herd'," explained the voice. "Singly we are nothingness, together we are All. Never before since our dawn have so many joined as All, but never before have we faced such peril, such danger of extinction."

"We came in peace," Kirk answered, raising his palms outwards, "but also in ignorance of this world's life. We mean you no harm. We do not take what is not ours. Your world is your own - we offer friendship, but we shall leave, never to return, if that is your wish."

"Kirk, think of what you're saying!" demanded Chung.

"Your presence here does not disturb us, but..." the Vulcan smiled ruefully, "we do seem to disturb you. Only this one has accepted our merging. His mind is different, but even he fights to be alone. This is a strange concept to us. Alone." The voice paused for a moment, considering. "Through his mind we have seen much - including a way for us to survive."

"If we can help..." Kirk offered.

"Yes, Captain, we need your help. The other ship that came - we tried to touch it to explain, but we were too few." The voice sounded wistful. "We did not see, as we do now, how important the gathering of All is. We were too weak, but we felt they sensed our presence."

"The interference..." Kirk stated, understanding. "You were trying to communicate."

"The ship left, but another came and left the Humans. We thought you had understood our plight; we tried to communicate our gratitude, but your minds are so frail, bending to our will, being absorbed. This one was different - through him we have seen we were mistaken, and that this one must stop you, Captain."

"Stop me?"

"You must not leave," the voice ordered. "We cannot let your ship leave our world."

"The systems malfunction?" queried Kirk. "You were responsible for that through Spock?"

"Jim," McCoy interrupted, his voice low, "that thing's draining Spock. If they hold him much longer he'll be absorbed into them. They've got to let go soon."

"We will release this one before he becomes one of us," answered the voice. "We have learned from our period on your ship how long he

can be one of the All."

"What do you want of us?" Kirk demanded. "We've told you we came in peace. Why do you want to hold us here as prisoners?"

"We do not wish to... hold you," answered the voice, confused.

"You said you would not allow us to leave; you disabled my ship to stop us."

"You cannot be allowed to leave with the breath of our life. You cannot be allowed to destroy our race." The voice was anguished. "The plant you brought gave us hope, it saves us, it gives us back the breath that feeds us. We cannot let you take this away again. That is why we have gathered as never before."

McCoy instantly understood the voice's meaning. "Jim, he's saying the herds were dying before Chung and his people came here and gave them back their 'breath of life'. Don't you see?" he asked the perplexed Captain. "The herd need the respiratory gases of the Antiquar plant the way we need oxygen. If we take the plant away, they'll die - the whole race will slide into extinction."

On board the Enterprise again, seated comfortably in his command chair with Spock and McCoy at his side, Kirk sighed.

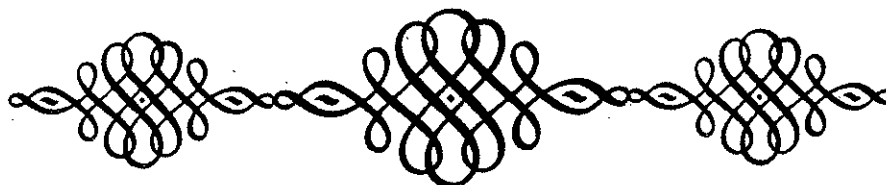
"I suppose I'm going to have to rewrite all my reports on the Nibron project, thanks to Mr. Spock." He winked at McCoy. "And I've still to convene a court-martial. After all, sabotaging a Starship is a very serious offence."

"Indeed, Captain," Spock replied, "but had Mr. Chung allowed the Federation to complete a full survey of Nibron instead of demanding his test project be approved immediately, such drastic action by the herd would not have been necessary."

"But because he didn't trust the Council," Kirk added, "he's only now got permission for full-scale sowing because the Council only now know the full background."

"Well, it's all's well that ends well," McCoy quoted. "Chung's got what he wants, and the herd have what they want." He folded his arms across his chest, beaming happily. "Kinda gives you a warm feeling inside, doesn't it, to think we've saved an entire species from extinction?"

"Indeed, Doctor," agreed Spock, to both Kirk's and McCoy's surprise. Spock raised an elegant eyebrow, adding, "Considering how many Humanity has sent into extinction, it does indeed make a refreshing change."





the AWAKENING



by

Elaine Sheard

She tried not to show her exasperation with the Vulcan Ambassador. Before coming she had read what she could about Vulcans, and knew she must try to hide her feelings.

"Your Excellency, you will have to be more forthcoming for your son's sake. You accept both the Vulcan and Human doctors' opinions that your son's refusal to speak or to acknowledge outside contact has a mental, not a physical origin. In a child of nine you must know that the most likely reason is his relationship with his parents. The accident which caused him to lose consciousness was just the watershed."

Ambassador Seram gave her one of those superior Vulcan looks. She had heard others say that Vulcans were attractive, but so far she had not found them so. There was a coldness about them that she could not like.

"Doctor Grayson," the Ambassador began, but she interrupted him.

"Just 'Miss', please; as my work concerns children with mental difficulties I often get mistaken for an M.D."

"Very well. Miss Grayson, I have told you all I can of my relationship with my son. As his mother died in childbirth he spent most of his formative years with his aunt. He has only lived with me since he was seven, as is our custom in such circumstances."

"And his relationship with his Aunt?"

"I have a great respect for my sister. She has more than done her duty by the boy."

Amanda could think of no polite answer to that, so she changed the subject. "In that case, could I perhaps meet his teacher and familiarise myself with the Vulcan education system?"

"Yes, indeed. We have a resident tutor for the Embassy children. The staff also take classes, as many of them have qualifications in subjects other than diplomacy. Our First Secretary arranges this, and will be at your disposal to help in any way he can."

"That is most courteous, sir, but before I accept his help I would like to discuss the matter of fees."

"Healer Seftor and Dr. Brownlaw both speak highly of you, despite your youth. Any fee you suggest will be acceptable."

"My cases' parents set the fee. I must warn you, it could take many hours, and there is no guarantee of success. I charge up to 60 credits an hour. Some pay nothing, some much less than the full amount. I only take cases I think I can help. Some of the richer parents subsidise the poorer. If you object to this we can arrange a fee halfway between the two."

"That will not be necessary. The higher fee, and the reason for it, are quite acceptable. In matters of family health money is of secondary importance. I shall expect a weekly report. You may make any enquiries or requests to the First Secretary, who is of the same family. He will arrange for you to see my son, who is in Dr. Brownlaw's clinic."

"That will be quite agreeable."

"Good. I shall now ask the First Secretary to join us."

Suddenly Amanda could understand what people meant about Vulcans. She felt herself blushing - she had heard about instant attraction, but had never really believed in it. She also realised why the book she had consulted had laid such stress on the fact that Vulcans were only *touch* telepaths as, while the Ambassador introduced his assistant and passed on her request about her doctorate, the First Secretary seemed to read her every thought.

That was silly. Anyway, his voice was probably dull or toneless - to someone who had considered becoming a professional musician, that was important. But when he spoke his voice, though full of Vulcan reserve, was as beautifully modulated and attractive as the rest of him.

This would not do! As they walked along the Embassy corridor to the schoolroom she took a deep breath, and by the time she was being introduced to the teacher T'Bella, she was more or less back to normal.

The children were charming. There were twenty of them, and they varied in age from about 6 to 16. They worked in small groups, very quiet and well behaved, yet they asked questions and their eyes shone with interest and intelligence.

Amanda sat and observed the class all afternoon. When the children were dismissed she had a long talk with T'Bella about the Ambassador's son, Smarre. There seemed to be no obvious reason for his withdrawal. T'Bella was very helpful with information about Vulcan educational and family expectations. Corporal punishment seemed unknown. Example and personal commitment encouraged the child to learn. T'Bella assured her that child abuse was unknown. Everyone regarded it as a duty to make what contribution of time and resource they could. The children, she was told, responded by respecting the family structure and utilising what ability they had. It appeared very well organised, and it seemed to work. Amanda wasn't sure that there would have been the same response from Human children.

When she was ready to leave T'Bella sent for a young Under-Secretary. (It was hard to tell how old Vulcans were, but T'Bella seemed to treat him as a young man.)

"May I escort you to First Secretary Sarek's office, Miss Grayson?" he asked.

"Yes, thank you." She knew Vulcans didn't say thank you, but surely that didn't apply to her.

Sarek stood when she entered. The office was large and functional, but with a beautiful example of Vulcan art on one wall. Thankfully, it was somewhat cooler than the classroom.

"Miss Grayson, I shall be available to take you to the clinic any afternoon in the next three days. The Ambassador has asked me to introduce you to the Matron and staff personally."

"That would be most helpful, Mr. Sarek."

"The designation of gender is not necessary, Miss Grayson."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"There is no need to apologise."

There was silence. Did he *have* to be so intimidating? Amanda thought. Just because he turned her bones to jelly didn't mean she could be put down. She spoke firmly. "I shall be free from 2 p.m. tomorrow."

"Very well. As the clinic is 10 miles from the city I shall drive us there. Where may I collect you?"

He thinks I'm a parcel, Amanda thought as she gave him her address. He did, however, walk her to her bicycle and hold it while she mounted.

She had a great deal to think about on the way home. When she got there she told Susan, her flatmate, all about her day. Susan was a stunning blonde who hid her sharp mind behind a somewhat vapid expression. Now she was quick to pick out what she considered the most interesting part and said in a teasing voice,

"The children sound nice, but what about this Sarek? You sound to be quite taken with him."

"Nonsense. You know I don't regard physical attraction as all that important."

Susan laughed. "You'll learn. Frederick's no fool, but I wouldn't have stayed with him so long if he hadn't given me goose pimples."

Susan's boyfriend, a Solar System Pilot, was both handsome and intelligent, but so was Amanda's, as she now told Susan.

"David is everything you say, besides being rich and well-connected, with a great future as a lawyer, but intellectual attraction isn't enough, and you know it - or you should. Just because he's the only one who hasn't been frightened by your I.Q."

"That's not the only reason I like him."

"I hope not, but watch out - there's such a thing as being *too* perfect."

The next afternoon Sarek arrived punctually in a luxurious aircar. Inside it was warm, but not too warm. As they sped along Amanda felt nervous. Sarek was even more devastating than she remembered. She talked about music, and found him most knowledgeable. The time passed easily, and when they arrived at the clinic she was able to give her thoughts to her work.

The clinic had an excellent reputation. The head, Betty Carstairs, was well known in her field. Amanda felt somewhat on the defensive, but the welcome she received was warm.

After performing the introductions Sarek left them alone. Amanda's subsequent conversation with Betty, a tall thin woman of that indeterminate age between 30 and 60, was very informative. On this first visit Amanda did not actually meet the child Smarre. She listened carefully to the details of his stay in the clinic, even seeing a film of his behaviour. Betty had accepted her readily as a fellow professional. When the conversation turned to the future she showed great interest in the proposed course of treatment.

Amanda told her, "I shall concentrate on language. While with him I am going to teach myself Vulcan with the aid of tapes and all the educational tools Smarre is familiar with. I shall act as if we are learning together. I hope he will come to recognise something, or even want to correct my errors. Sound, pictures... the boy is there *somewhere*, and I shall try to reach him."

Betty looked thoughtful. "It could work. Let's hope so. All the known methods have proved useless. In a way you are in a fortunate position. I have learned something of Vulcans in the year Smarre has been here. They will go to enormous lengths to help a child. His father visits Smarre every week, though he is not recognised. Take the fact that the First Secretary has brought you here in person, and is now walking in the garden killing time while we talk. There are more than 200 staff at the Embassy, and as you know they represent the interests of many other worlds who do not have their own diplomats. He must have hundreds of things requiring his attention. In their own way Vulcans are both courteous and attentive, but they expect only the best in return."

"I understand that. It's a little frightening, but I'm only here because I think I can help the boy."

"I know that, and I think the Vulcans do too."

As Sarek drove her home Amanda had a lot to think about, and Sarek respected her silence. When they arrived outside her apartment building she turned to him.

"I intend to follow the line I have already outlined to the Ambassador. I still think this could be a successful method, but I must emphasise that there are no guarantees."

"We understand that, but have every confidence in you."

"I appreciate that, and the fact that you accompanied me in person today."

"I was honoured. The family regard this matter as of great importance."

"I am aware of that. Well, I will wish you good day."

As she made to get out of the car Sarek said, "I shall escort you to your door."

"There is no need. This is a quiet neighbourhood, and it is broad daylight."

"Nevertheless, you are in my care."

"Is that not rather old-fashioned?"

"I could not say, but on Earth it is as well to be cautious."

"I suppose so."

It was some weeks later that Amanda received an invitation to a reception at the Vulcan Embassy. David, her boyfriend, was away, so she asked her flatmate to go with her. As a model Susan had, Amanda thought, almost an obsession with clothes. She asked Amanda what she was going to wear.

"It will be warm, so I shall wear my blue cotton."

"You can't wear that - it's so ordinary. Anyway, you've had it for ages."

"It should be fine, and it's an acceptable colour. I understand some greens and reds can look odd to Vulcan eyes."

"I know that, silly. I have just the dress for you. It was for a lady diplomat, but was never used. I can get it cost."

The dress was rather nice, grey with insets of lemon. Amanda thought it rather a lot of fuss, but wore it to please her fashion-conscious friend.

The reception, to celebrate the acceptance of the ideals of the Vulcan philosopher Surak, was particularly for aliens, to express the meaning of IDIC. Amanda was quite glad of the dress, for the company was large and elegant. The temperature and refreshments were to suit non-Vulcan tastes.

After an official greeting from the Ambassador, Amanda and Susan were looking about when they met some old friends. Susan went off with them to find some dancing, while Amanda's old music professor took her to what was obviously a music room.

Here both Vulcans and non-Vulcans were listening to music. Though the players were not professionals the quality was very high. First a Vulcan woman played a kind of harp, and then, to Amanda's surprise, Sarek played a Vulcan stringed instrument with great skill and sensitivity.

Professor Gillon seemed to know many of those present, and after a short discussion he turned to Amanda and said, "I was telling T'Lena here that there's no better instrument than the piano, and I've got my prize pupil to prove it. You still keep in practice, my dear, don't you?" Without waiting for an answer he propelled her towards the piano.

Amanda knew without conceit that she was a good player, and said without embarrassment, "I do still play, but not well enough to give a professional performance."

She played Chopin with a skill and assurance that belied her youth. When she had finished there was silence for a few moments, then Sarek said,

"A most efficient demonstration of Human logic in music, Miss Grayson."

She merely smiled, but the rest of the company engaged in what, unexpectedly, was a rather heated discussion. Amanda turned to Sarek.

"You are a most skillful player, Sarek."

"After hearing you play I think you honour me, Amanda. I understand that you and Miss White arrived by hired transport?"

"That's right. Though both Susan and I drive, it's not practical to keep a car in town."

"Understandable. Though my duties will keep me here, will you allow one of my aides to see you and Miss White home?"

"If it's not too much trouble."

"Not at all. When you are ready to leave inform one of my staff."

She didn't speak to Sarek again, though the Ambassador had a word with her. It was a little after 2 a.m. before Susan was ready to leave. The young man who took them home was unknown to Amanda. He said little and seemed somewhat disapproving, which made Susan giggle.

When they arrived at the apartment building he let them get out of the car without a word, and prepared to leave. Amanda was beginning to find his attitude annoying, but felt that she must tell him how the First Secretary had insisted on walking her to her door. He had the grace to apologise, and did indeed walk them to their apartment.

"Did Sarek really say that?"

"Of course he did. Do you think I made it up?"

"I know you better than that, though your description of Sarek hardly did him justice."

"What do you mean?"

"I got talking to the Andorian Ambassador's daughter, and apparently he's quite a man. He has more degrees than you have, and his family have a member on the Vulcan High Council - and what's more, he's a bachelor," she finished triumphantly.

Amanda couldn't resist saying, "He can't be - he must be old enough to marry."

"No doubt, but Tillar's father has known him since they studied computer science together nearly 40 years ago, so he should know."

"There's no reason why I should be interested in Tillar's gossip. All right, he's an attractive man, but so is Frederick and so is David."

Susan just laughed at that.

The next weekend Amanda went to stay with her boyfriend David's parents for the first time. Their friendship was a slow and steady one, so she went happily enough. It was Sunday evening when she returned. Susan was already home, as Frederick was away on a trip. She looked up as the door opened and said in a worried voice,

"Good gracious, you look terrible! What happened?"

Amanda sat down slowly and said in an almost toneless voice, "Nothing, really. They were most hospitable. The house is beautiful, with some really good pictures and furniture. The family were very friendly. Then they started talking about what kind of people they

wanted their children to be - how all that really mattered was intelligence and artistic appreciation. You get the picture?"

"All too well. Where did David come in all this?"

"Oh, he was doing fine - all he needed now was a wife who was artistic and had a socially relevant job."

"Were they by any chance talking about you?"

"They were. They never came right out with it, but yes."

"Oh dear. What did you say?"

"Nothing then. It was less blatant than it sounds - it just came up over the weekend. David drove me home, and I had to be frank with him and tell him I could see no future in our relationship."

"How did he take it?"

"Like a gentleman, I suppose, but he was angry underneath and seemed to blame me. Yet we haven't known each other that long."

"Oh Amanda, I am sorry."

"There's no need to be, because you were right. I only liked him because he was convenient, and seemed to accept me as I am. It was never really enough. Do you know, what I felt most of all tonight was relief. He wasn't a bad man, it was just that there was no magic between us."

It was some weeks later that Amanda went to the Vulcan Embassy to collect some books T'Bella had for her. She had always got on well with T'Bella, but today the Vulcan woman seemed rather cool towards her. As Amanda was about to leave T'Bella said coldly,

"You will no doubt be pleased to know that Sarek took your complaint against Sreel very seriously."

Amanda was puzzled. "I made no complaint. What are you talking about?"

"My cousin Sreel, who took you home from the reception."

"I only told him that as Sarek walked me to my door he should perhaps do the same. I certainly never mentioned it to anyone. Why should I? He was most apologetic."

"You accepted his apology?"

"I did."

T'Bella's face relaxed somewhat. "Then Sreel reported the incident to Sarek, who considered he deserved one of his training exercises."

Amanda was intrigued and asked curiously, "Whatever do you mean?"

T'Bella hesitated and then said, "I suppose you have a right to an explanation. Sarek is known in diplomatic circles for his punitive training exercises."

"What happened to your poor cousin?"

"He is in charge of the Tellarite trade delegation."

"Aren't they very bad tempered?"

"They are. The diplomatic community usually share these jobs, but Sarek volunteered Sreel's services for their whole visit. He also indicated that he was looking for a good report from them. I have never heard of one being forthcoming."

"I'm sorry, T'Bella, but it really wasn't my fault."

"I am aware of that now."

After leaving T'Bella Amanda was passing through Reception when one of the clerks addressed her.

"Miss Grayson, First Secretary Sarek asked that you call at his office before you leave."

"I'll go there now."

She was admitted at once and Sarek, his usual impeccable self, said gravely, "I understand you accepted my subordinate's apology for his lack of courtesy to you and your companion after the reception. However, I would like you to know that I do not take the matter lightly, and have so informed him."

"I hope you weren't too hard on the young man."

"Not at all. I merely made him aware of his responsibilities. However, that is not really why I asked you to come here. I would like to invite you to a recital by the Vulcan musician T'Mela. I am sure you would find it interesting."

"I would, but the recital has been booked up for months."

"No doubt, but provision has been made for the Embassy staff and their guests. The party will include Healer Salar and his wife T'Lena, Saret our accountant and his wife T'Bella, and myself. I believe you are already acquainted with the ladies?"

"I am, and I would be honoured to accept your invitation."

So it was that a week later a party of six, five Vulcans and Amanda, went to the legendary T'Mela's recital. The music was all and more than expected, so it was a somewhat dreamy Amanda who joined the others in a vegetarian restaurant after the concert. The party had been very carefully chosen so that all could relax in each others company, no-one having authority over a Vulcan Healer, and Saret not being a career diplomat. The conversation was wide-ranging and interesting. Amanda greatly enjoyed herself, apart from one rather strange incident.

They were discussing Smarre and his progress, and Amanda was telling them,

"He is listening, I know he is. When I make a mistake in your language he mouths the correct word, but will still not actually speak. His brain is working. It's only a matter of time."

T'Bella said, "You are making remarkable progress."

"Not really, but recognising error and wanting to correct it is a basic part of educational training. Smarre must have met this before, and in time will speak. He must."

Sarek commented, "Training is important, but I would not have thought it would have made such an impression."

T'Bella said dryly, "It's certainly making an impression on my cousin Sreel."

There was silence. T'Bella blushed and her husband finally said evenly,

"T'Bella's concern for her cousin has perhaps made her indiscreet, Sarek."

Amanda had to speak. "It's really my fault. I probably should not have said anything to the boy."

Sarek said coolly, "It's as well that you did, as if it had come to my notice from another source I would have seen him dismissed and sent back to Vulcan."

The four other Vulcans looked at him, their faces even more controlled than usual. Salar, his Healer's restraint much in evidence, spoke.

"That would have been harsh, Sarek."

Sarek was not rebuked. "I do not think so. Quite the contrary."

Salar gave him a long look. "That is apparent," he said at last. He then made a short comment in Vulcan, which was greeted in silence, though T'Bella blushed once more. Salar then addressed Amanda.

"You are not at fault. Indeed, as you accepted Sreel's apology so readily, we can now regard the matter as closed. Can't we, Sarek?"

Sarek replied implacably, "I appreciate T'Bella's family loyalty, and acknowledge your judgement in the matter."

The Vulcans then went on as though nothing had happened, and the evening ended amicably enough.

So once more Amanda was being escorted home by a Vulcan. She did not anticipate any trouble with the First Secretary as her escort. As they walked from the car, however, Amanda's thoughts were interrupted by someone shouting her name. She looked up in surprise and saw a man's figure lurch into the light. He was shouting as he came towards them.

"Amanda, my beautiful Amanda, I love you." With that he tried to put his arms around her.

Sarek however stopped him by holding his arms, apparently gently but preventing him from moving, and said without expression,

"This person appears to be intoxicated."

"It's David - but he hardly drinks at all." She came closer and wrinkled her nose as she smelled his breath.

Upon seeing her David said in a rather shaky voice, "I don't like your friend. He's hurting me."

Sarek released his arms and stepped back. As he did so David doubled over and was very sick all over the floor, splashing Sarek's trousers as he did so. Then he keeled over with a groan.

Sarek bent down to examine him. "Your friend seems to be unconscious."

Amanda spoke firmly. "Ex-friend. But even so, it's not safe to leave him. Besides, he might get thrown out of college if he's found like this."

Sarek's face relaxed and he almost sighed. "I sometimes overlook your youth. I must agree we had better take him home. Does he live alone?"

"No, he has a flatmate named Ryan."

"Very well. I will ride in the back of the car with him while you drive."

Amanda looked at the car and said doubtfully, "I'm not sure I can drive such a large car."

Sarek's voice was firm. "You will manage very well."

And she did. She drove somewhat slowly but quite competently to David's apartment. Sarek in silence picked David up without obvious effort and walked with him towards the building. Amanda followed somewhat breathlessly.

"It's the second floor. I had better get the lift."

"Unnecessary," was the brief reply.

Sarek stood back while Amanda entered first, and even operated the lift. When there was no answer at David's door Sarek set the unconscious man down and holding him with one hand went through his pockets until he found an electronic door key, which he handed to Amanda. She opened the door and they went inside. Sarek put his burden down on the couch, loosened the still unconscious man's clothing and turned him on his side. He was rewarded by a large snore.

Sarek turned to Amanda and spoke reassuringly. "His breathing appears to be unimpaired, but he cannot be left unattended until his condition stabilises."

"I'll stay with him until he comes to or Ryan returns."

Sarek was firm when he answered, "We will both stay. Perhaps you would like to get some rest while I watch this gentleman?"

"I couldn't do that. We'll both look after him for as long as is necessary." She paused, somewhat embarrassed, and then went on in a rush, "I'll watch him carefully if you want to go and sponge your clothing."

He replied neutrally, "Very well. When I return perhaps you would like to make yourself some refreshment?"

Amanda woke with a start. She had fallen asleep while sitting in a chair. She spoke guiltily. "I'm sorry - I didn't mean to fall asleep."

"There was no need for us both to stay awake, Amanda," Sarek replied gently.

Amanda was just about to argue when the sound of the door opening stopped her. Ryan entered and started in surprise when he saw them, but soon recovered and said questioningly,

"Hello, Amanda. I didn't expect to see you here."

She replied, not without irony, "I wouldn't be here if David hadn't turned up drunk outside my apartment. First Secretary Sarek was with me, and agreed to bring him home. He was so bad we daren't leave him."

Ryan looked down at his friend and said hopefully, "He took your parting very hard, Amanda. I don't suppose there's any chance of you getting back together?"

Amanda was firm. "No, there is not."

"I'm not really surprised. Well, don't worry, I'll take care of him." He turned to Sarek. "I'm sorry you've been put to so much trouble, sir."

Sarek didn't deny his inconvenience, but said with faint reproof, "It is as well for Miss Grayson and your friend that I was present. Now if you will excuse me I will take Miss Grayson home."

Amanda waited in Betty Carstairs' office while Healer Sefter attempted the mind meld which would, he believed, bring Smarre back to full awareness. In the past three weeks he had been speaking to Amanda, and even addressing the clinic staff in Vulcan.

Betty looked at her with sympathy. "If this is a success I understand Smarre will probably remember nothing that has happened since the accident."

Amanda answered calmly, "That is Sefter's opinion."

"Do you mind?"

"Of course not. Smarre's a sweet child, but it's a small price to pay if he makes a complete recovery."

Betty smiled at her. "You are very sensible for your age."

"Not really. I could well shed a tear or two when this is over."

"You may not be the only one," was the perhaps surprising reply.

Amanda was at the Vulcan Embassy with the Ambassador and the First Secretary. The Ambassador was almost genial as he said,

"My congratulations, Miss Grayson. Healer Sefter is now sure of

Smarre's complete recovery. I understand you do voluntary work for a children's charity. Our family have decided to make a financial contribution in acknowledgement of an Earthwoman's help towards Smarre's recovery."

Amanda looked at the substantial cheque and swallowed before answering. "You honour me with your generosity, Your Excellency."

As Amanda walked down the corridor with Sarek she realised that this would probably be the last time she would visit the Embassy. She turned to Sarek and said carefully, "Studying Vulcan has been very interesting, and I shall certainly miss Smarre's correction of my pronunciation."

Sarek replied evenly, "T'Bella runs a class for non-Vulcans here at the Embassy. I am sure arrangements can be made for you to attend."

"That would be most helpful."

"T'Mela is also to come here to give a private recital before she leaves Earth. I would be honoured if you could attend."

They had stopped as he spoke. She looked at him and replied gravely, "I should like that."



Final Frontier



To look into your dark eyes
Is like searching space's frontiers.
Inside that finely sculptured head
The ages could reside.
I am drawn into their depths
As if I never shall reach bottom.
Serenity beckons me
Within that darkly velvet tide.
I could give my mind to you
And you would care for it, and know it,
Understand my fears and weaknesses
And never once cry "Shame."
You would accept me just for what I was,
Not what I should be,
And it would be like a coming home,
For we are much the same.
I care not that you are different,
Your very body alien,
For I am also alien
In the ranks of my own kind.
Though you are far away
Yet I bear you with me forever
For you and I have crossed
The final frontiers of the mind.

Sheryl Peterson

VISIONS of ANOTHER YESTERDAY

by

Vicki Richards

The simulated nighttime of the Enterprise began. Throughout the great ship lights were dimmed, and her crew automatically lowered their voices and adjusted to the artificial evening with all the psychological ease of those accustomed to deep space travel. On Deck 5 a solitary Figure entered his quarters and sank thankfully onto his bed. Kirk was weary, and as distraught as a Starship Captain could ever allow himself to be.

One of the greatest attractions to any space traveller, especially to anyone in Starfleet service, was the opportunity to tread the unmarked paths of the universe; Kirk knew it had always been one of the main reasons behind what seemed his inevitable choice of career.

But somehow he had never quite visualised the crossing of unknown frontiers resulting in the situation he now faced - that they all now faced. Danger was an inherent part of the job, wordlessly accepted for the most part, and expecting the unexpected an everyday task.

Yet in all his nightmares he had never expected this.

His tired body and mind threatened to overcome his determination to stay awake at least long enough to do the thinking he had to do. Resolutely he pushed the waves of sleep away and forced his mind to turn again to the problems he had to solve. And this time, it seemed, he couldn't ask Spock to help.

The scene in Sickbay played over and over in his mind. He had the vague feeling he had seen it all before, in some other way, yet he couldn't quite put his finger on it. It had been like that ever since they passed through the energy barrier - was it affecting him too? Maybe he ought to mention it to Piper in the morning. But then... maybe not. Piper seemed so oddly out of place in Sickbay, as if someone else ought to be there; besides, Piper had enough problems at the moment trying to figure out what was happening to Spock.

Gary Mitchell had been watching the Vulcan on the Bridge viewer, and Kirk found it vaguely annoyed him that his old friend had been eavesdropping on the Science Officer. He found it confusing that he couldn't regard Gary with anything but mistrust these days - not that Mitchell had actually done anything particular to provoke such a reaction, but Kirk had known in that instant that he now regarded Spock as more of a real friend than Gary Mitchell had ever been.

He knew it instinctively; it seemed far more real to him to think of Spock as his friend than to think of what had been happening the last few days. It was as if he watched an old film for the umpteenth time, but with the scenes and actors in different orders and roles. He wished it was a nightmare - but he knew it was real. Terrifyingly real. And the sense of omnipresent danger he couldn't account for wouldn't leave him. Somewhere along the line he was going to have to make a decision so painful he didn't want to think about it. Something else he seemed

to know.

Goddam Vulcan - why did he have to have such a high ESP rating? Why did Spock have to be the one to be affected most of all?

It was no good - he couldn't hold off sleep any longer. As he drifted off, still he was left with the vivid image of the Vulcan sitting up in Sickbay, reading everything in the ship's library at a speed unnatural even for Spock's brilliant mind. Unnatural for anyone. And he saw in his mind once again the way Spock had turned to look directly at them through the viewer, as if he had known they watched. Even in his sleep, Kirk could feel the chilling menace behind his friend's frightening silver eyes.

"He will enjoy this vision, Loth," said the alien expectantly to his companion. "This Human is a good subject for the Transolith drug. He will suffer."

"Yes, Laren," the other replied. "It was truly fortunate our agents were able to capture his small ship. Federation commanders do not often travel alone, or in a weakened shuttle. What he is makes him an excellent choice - there is bound to be a deep psychological trauma he has buried in his subconscious. See - the drug releases it already."

Laren nodded, an unpleasant anticipatory grin on his round face. "The pleasure we will experience from his vision will be immense, I am sure," he gloated. "I have never understood why more cultures do not gain pleasure this way."

"Because they are weak fools," Loth said sneeringly. "They do not have the Tlexorite capacity for such enjoyment. Even the Klingons do not realise the subtleties of mental torture fully. Their mind-sifters are puny failures compared to the Transolith drug - and they would not have the intelligence required to experience fully the delights of subject's hidden fears."

Laren dwelled for a moment on the satisfying superiority of his race. "I wonder if this one will survive the vision," he pondered. "Humans are seldom strong enough to do so."

"What does it matter? Besides, I always enjoy it more when they do not. I like to see them squirm before they die. I do not think this one will resolve the trauma, either. And death is always the result of that. See - he wakes in his dream. Let us watch, and feel his pain."

Kirk did his duty shift on the Bridge. They were still on course for Delta Vega with no further complications. They had to reach the facilities there as soon as possible, as soon as impulse drive allowed. Without the use of the warp drive they might never make it back to the inhabited parts of the galaxy. That they might not be able to repair the warp engines was a possibility no-one wanted to consider.

The news from Sickbay was not good. Piper had reported that Spock's condition seemed to be worsening. Dr. Dehner was observing him, ostensibly trying to find some clue as to how they could halt and reverse the terrifying change overtaking the Vulcan. Soon he would have to go down there himself. Part of him desperately wanted to see Spock, but another part did not want to see those silver eyes again. In the back of his mind he sensed again that decision he would have to make,

and he knew his subconscious would not yet let him know what that decision was. He was worried about Dehner, too - the way she was acting. He couldn't understand why, but he felt in some way she was a threat also.

Suddenly he became aware of Gary Mitchell standing at his shoulder, in the place where Spock habitually stood, and he found he resented it.

"We both know what's happening to Spock, Jim," said Mitchell.

Kirk turned to look at him.

"We have to talk, Jim," Mitchell went on. "It's what happened on the Valiant. He's growing more powerful all the time. In the end he's going to destroy us, and you know it. I never did quite trust that Vulcan. We have to kill him now, while we have the chance. We have no choice."

Kirk could hardly believe his ears, or the anger that he felt. "Never quite trusted him, Gary?" The menace in Kirk's voice would have shrivelled most people on the spot, and Mitchell didn't look too comfortable.

"You know what I mean, Jim." Yet Mitchell's words carried no tone of apology in them.

"Yes, Mr. Mitchell," Kirk said coldly, "I think I do. We'll discuss this later." He turned to Scott at the Engineering Station. "Mr. Scott, you have the con. I'll be in Sickbay if I'm needed."

With a glare at the unrepentant Mitchell, Kirk entered the turbolift, his thoughts reeling. He knew it had something to do with that impossible decision he would have to make. And how dare Gary say such things about Spock? Spock, who had saved his Captain's life more times than he could count. Spock, who was always there when needed.

Kirk almost stopped the turbolift between floors. What was he thinking about? It wasn't *that* long since he had taken command of the Enterprise - but he thought he could remember times when...

Things that couldn't have happened yet. *Was* it the energy barrier affecting him too? Strangely, he felt a reluctance to discuss it with Piper, no matter what his resolutions of the night before had been. He still had the feeling that there should be some other, friendlier, face in Sickbay. And again he felt that terrible decision awaiting him. Just around the corner.

It seemed that he knew what was happening elsewhere; even what people were thinking.

"Dr. Dehner, you must surely admit that the Vulcan way of logic is the most efficient philosophy by which to live - by which to govern a universe?" The Vulcan's voice held a chilling aura of command unlike Spock's normal tone, and at times it echoed strangely around Sickbay.

"I think I see what you mean, Mr. Spock," Dehner replied after a moment, "more than I ever did before. But it frightens me."

"Fear has no basis in logic," said the Vulcan. "You can cast it aside. I can show you how - I have learned much these past few days, much I could not see before, hampered as I was by the Human part of me."

"Then you see the way in which you have changed?"

"It is a change for the better. We must strive for perfection - perfection and logic. It is the only way. The others must be made to see - everyone must be made to see."

Kirk was aware that Dehner could see the fanatical light in the silver eyes, and that she found herself strangely compelled by the Vulcan's words. That she *could* understand what he meant, and wanted to be a part of it. That she was tired of the way Humans treated her - Gary Mitchell had called her 'a walking freezer unit' so often she felt she'd scream if she heard the words one more time. But Spock... She'd respected him as a colleague, now he was something more. He understood and respected the scientist in her more than any ordinary person could. Somehow Kirk knew she would listen to what he had to say.

"I believe you can understand," said Spock, increasing the hypnotic power of his voice. "Would you not like to become greater than you are? You have the potential. The others must learn, or they will not survive. I have no wish to destroy, but imperfection is illogical and must be eliminated."

"Are you really *that* powerful?" The awe in her tone was unmistakable.

The Vulcan nodded. "Watch," was all he said.

Turning, he regarded the monitors above his bed, all struggling with the anomalies of the Vulcan/Human readings Piper had never quite learned to cope with. Almost instantly they changed to what would have been perfectly normal for a Human. But only for a moment. By the merest effort of his will Spock sent the indicators to the highest readings possible. As coolly as only a Vulcan could, Spock looked back at the transfixed Dehner. Then he allowed the monitors to return to their previous level.

"You... you should be dead!" she exclaimed when she finally found her voice.

Sheer shock had driven all professionalism from her, as Spock had intended. The Human woman was certainly not the ideal choice for a partner in the task he had to undertake, but she was the only other on the Enterprise to have a high enough Esper ability. He had to win her over. If the imperfections of Human illogic and emotion could be wiped from this one, then he would know his plans for the universe were bound to succeed.

"But I am not," replied the Vulcan. Then he halted in whatever he had been going to say to her and cocked his head, as if listening for something. Almost immediately the Sickbay doors opened, and Kirk entered.

"Good morning, Jim," said the Vulcan in something more like his normal tone. "I have been expecting you."

"I would have come before, but I was needed on the Bridge," Kirk said, more warily than he had intended. He sensed an undercurrent in the atmosphere. Something had passed between Spock and Dehner - or had been about to do so. Had he been right not to trust her? Despite all the evidence of his own eyes, and all he seemed to know, still he could not quite bring himself not to trust Spock. Yet he knew he must not. "How are you?"

"Everyone seems most concerned that there should be something extremely wrong with me," said the Vulcan evenly. "However, there is not. Apart from the obvious change in my eyes, there is nothing to be concerned about regarding my physical well-being. In fact, in many ways I feel better than I have ever felt before. Even my eyes see better. Further. I can see many things I could not see before. When will I be allowed to return to duty?"

"As soon as we're sure nothing really is wrong," replied Kirk as normally as he could. "I must go back to the Bridge now. Dr. Dehner will inform me if you're fit for duty when she has completed her observations. I'll be back to see you later."

Alarm bells were going off in Kirk's mind. Suddenly he had visualised what was happening to Spock, what he would become, so clearly that he'd almost thought it was a memory - and he wasn't at all surprised when he was halted in his tracks a few paces towards the door by the sound of the Vulcan's mutated voice, ringing with power and utterly unnatural, calling commandingly after him.

"It would be better if you accede to my requests."

Kirk didn't even turn round. He just carried on out of Sickbay, doing his utmost to quell the tremors coursing through him. Through his soul. He knew what the terrible decision was now, and he really thought he couldn't make it.

He didn't think he could kill Spock - not even for the safety of the ship.

The Tlexorites sharing Kirk's vision through the use of their mind-linking equipment and the Transolith drug were practically insane with cruel glee.

"The trauma!" gasped Loth in a moment of lucidity. "That is it - he knows it now. He must decide whether to kill his friend the Vulcan, or save his ship! I do not think he will be able to choose."

"Then he will die," gloated the other. "It will be most pleasurable. I hope his suffering will be prolonged."

The atmosphere in the briefing room was grim, especially since Kelso had told Kirk about the starboard impulse engines. If Spock hadn't warned the lieutenant to look again at the points it would have meant disaster. The fact that Spock had known exactly what Kelso had to look for, without ever having been out of Sickbay, only confirmed Kirk's worst suspicions about the change which had overcome the Vulcan, about the terror he knew in his heart to be real without needing any real proof at all. He maintained a calm outward mien only by a supreme effort; inside he was more afraid than he could ever remember being. More and more he felt he could not face the terrible choice which awaited him.

Dehner was going on about the fact that Humans had always been afraid of what they didn't understand, that she could see Spock had become 'a better kind of person'. Kirk let her have her say, all the while experiencing again the horrible déjà vu feeling of having somehow seen this scene played out before. Was it just that all his secret fears were coming true?

Kirk could see from the expression on Gary Mitchell's face that he was also beginning to have doubts about Elizabeth Dehner - not that there had ever been any love lost between the two. Mitchell stood, and faced Kirk with a look on his face that told his Captain he was not going to like what Mitchell had to say.

"You know it all points to one thing, Jim," said Mitchell coldly. "The Vulcan's becoming more powerful by the moment. Soon we're going to be actually an annoyance to him. We have to kill him - now, before he destroys us."

Kirk rose from his chair, fury in his eyes. "Thank you, ladies and gentlemen," he managed to get out. "That will be all - you may return to your duties. If there is a decision to make, I will make it," he stated for Mitchell's benefit.

Those present left the meeting, except Mitchell, who hung back and approached Kirk.

"The Captain of the Valiant probably felt the same way, and he waited too long to make the decision. I think we've both guessed that. You have to do it now, Jim."

"Get out of here!" Kirk snarled. He was so angry that Mitchell could say such a thing about Spock - Spock, who had always been his true friend, more than Mitchell had ever been - that he hardly noticed when Gary left. He sank down at the table, head in hands. The fact was that he knew Mitchell was right. And still he couldn't decide. There *had* to be another way.

They had finally reached orbit around Delta Vega. Kirk approached Sickbay, Dehner and Piper behind him. He knew he was taking a dreadful chance, but marooning Spock on the planet seemed the only thing he could do. He just could *not* kill Spock. Maybe it would work; maybe he'd be harmless down there. The effects of the energy barrier might burn themselves out eventually; maybe one day they could go back for him. In the meantime surely the distance of Delta Vega from other, inhabited, planets would be enough to protect the ship, and the Federation, from harm. It had to be. But still he was afraid. Although he tried to deny it, still his sense of *deja vu* told him it would *not* be enough.

Dehner carried a hypo filled with a powerful tranquiliser. Just in case she failed to act at the proper moment Piper carried one too, at Kirk's orders. He still couldn't bring himself quite to trust Elizabeth Dehner, and he knew it had to do with his overwhelming sensation that he'd seen all this before.

Gary Mitchell waited for them at the door to Sickbay, and for one fleeting instant Kirk had the shocking impression that *Mitchell* should have been the one they were going to do this to. Not Spock. Not his Vulcan friend.

Deeply disturbed by what could only be a subconscious wish, Kirk suppressed the thought. There was a painful task that had to be done. Following Kirk, the small party marched into Sickbay.

By Spock's side was an empty water cup. Kirk found he knew, without being told, that Spock had merely wished for a drink of water, and the psychokinesis had happened. Spock had grown powerful beyond the ordinary laws of the universe, and the look in the silver eyes told Kirk that the Vulcan sensed his understanding both of what Spock had just

done, and of what he had become.

"It's like a blind man being given sight, Jim. Sometimes I feel there's nothing I couldn't do, in time. Some people think that makes me a monster." Spock spoke the words Kirk had expected to hear. The dreadful nightmare continued to play itself out before him. And yet the words were incongruous, not a Vulcan speech pattern. Kirk felt his hold on reality slipping.

"And what do I think, Spock?" he asked gently.

"I can sense mainly worry in you, Jim. The safety of your ship."

Kirk nodded sadly. Still it all followed the expected pattern. He knew the thing had to be done.

"Now!" He gave the order, and was vaguely surprised when Dahner didn't hesitate. But they needed the second hypo - one was not enough to subdue the struggling Vulcan.

Spock lapsed into unconsciousness, and Kirk stood watching. One of the things he'd expected hadn't happened. No lightning bolts had come from Spock's hands to throw them all back across the room, and with a profound sorrow Kirk knew it was because Spock, his friend, still couldn't make himself do that to them.

"Take him to the transporter room," said Kirk before he could change his mind.

They were on the surface of Delta Vega. The great dilithium processing station, indeed the whole planet, was deserted except for the Enterprise landing party. It appeared that one decision of Kirk's had at least been the correct one - repairs to the warp engines were going ahead without too many problems. Kirk observed the work of the landing party and ruefully thought about that decision - at the time it had also seemed to be one way he could save the ship without having to kill Spock. But now... now Spock had become so powerful, had changed so much, that Kirk doubted even marooning would be enough to ensure the Federation's safety.

He knew the only one aboard his ship who had ever thought to doubt the rightness of his decisions these last few days had been himself. And Gary Mitchell. And perhaps Spock - if such things mattered to the Vulcan any more.

But he *did* doubt. He knew what he had to do, and he simply could not. For the first time in his career - in his life - there was a decision he could not force himself to take. His mind reeled - his whole being rebelled against it. How *could* he ever bring himself to give an order that would end the life of one who meant more to him than any other friend he had ever known? Yet if he did not - if Mitchell was right - the safety of the whole universe might be at stake.

A deadly chill swept through him. He knew the time would soon come when he would *have* to act. And Spock... Spock in his right mind would know what should be done. Even in his metamorphosis the Vulcan knew it.

Spock, my friend, Kirk thought, I know you would be strong enough - but am I? Am I?

Lee Kelso was wiring the fuel bins so they could be detonated if

necessary. Even giving *that* order had cost Kirk so much. He saw Gary Mitchell enter the room, and once again knew before he opened his mouth exactly the words he was going to say.

"He's regaining consciousness." Mitchell spoke the words like a death knell.

Spock stood silently behind the security force-screen, watching them. Somehow the Vulcan's unspeaking mien impressed on them even more the power he now commanded. Kirk wondered how long it would be before he would become strong enough to break through the force-field.

"I want only one medical officer watching him at a time," said Kirk. "The other can watch on the dispensary screen."

"I'd like to stay and watch him now," Dehner said immediately. Kirk allowed it, although he was not certain of the wisdom of that decision.

He walked over and stood directly in front of the force screen. Spock was looking at him, an expression both menacing and yet infinitely sad on his face. Yet Kirk understood he was the only one present who could see the always-denied emotion in Spock's eyes. Those damned *silver* eyes.

"My friend James Kirk," Spock said quietly, a wealth of regret in the even tones; but the menace was still there as well.

"Do you remember Neural, Jim?" asked the Vulcan. "And Vaal's planet? And all those other places?"

Kirk remained silent, shocked to the core. Spock was reminding him of all those times when he had saved Kirk's life. All those times that Kirk could remember - the times that couldn't have happened yet.

Was Spock reading his mind, using his thoughts against him? But it all seemed so *real*, so very real. Kirk didn't understand what was happening. Was he losing his mind? He wished so desperately that *this* wasn't real... but he knew it was.

"What would you have me do, Spock?" It was an anguished cry from the soul.

"Gary Mitchell knows," replied Spock. "And in your heart, so do you. But will you do it? You know you have to decide."

The terror of that decision swept through Kirk again, and he almost felt his consciousness escape him. But he held on, ignoring the dizziness and the nausea that threatened to overwhelm him. As his head cleared he saw that Spock was trying to get through the force-screen, and the agony on the Vulcan's face made him cry out.

"Spock - no!"

Spock fell back from the screen, and for a fleeting moment his eyes became his own deep-brown ones. He mouthed Kirk's name, a cry for help. Then the silver film came again, and Kirk knew with utter desolation that Spock was lost to the change. The process was irreversible.

Aboard the great Starship the warp engines hummed back into life as repairs were completed. On Delta Vega Kirk received the message that the Enterprise was ready to leave. With a heavy heart he forced himself finally to give Kelso the order to wire the fuel bins to a self-destruct circuit. Filled with an unspeakable grief, he made his way back to the holding cell. Dehner, Piper and Mitchell awaited him. And so did the silent occupant of the cell.

"He's been like that for hours now." Dehner looked towards the Vulcan, who stood immobile just inside the force-screen.

Kirk nodded. "The ship is ready to leave orbit. We're beaming up. Kelso will be on the destruct button until the last minute." He saw with something approaching hatred the expression of satisfaction on Mitchell's face at that last piece of information.

"And if he tries to stop us?" said Mitchell. Kirk glared at him, and at the phaser rifle he carried, beamed down without Kirk's knowledge.

"I'm staying behind - with him!" Dehner almost shouted - and Kirk knew he had been right not to trust her.

"You're beaming up with the rest of us." Kirk's order was curt, in a tone not meant to be disobeyed.

"He is *not* evil!" Dehner's near-scream carried the edges of hysteria.

Kirk was about to reprimand her, to order Mitchell to place her under guard, but was stopped by an echoing, all-powerful voice from the cell.

"James - you should have killed me while you could. Command and compassion are a fool's mixture."

Spock raised his right hand in a gesture of absolute control and approached the force-field. And walked right through it.

They rushed forward in what Kirk knew would be a useless attempt at restraining the metamorphosed Vulcan. The lightning bolts Kirk had expected came from Spock's upraised hands and hit them, all of them except Elizabeth Dehner. The three others fell to the ground unconscious. As Kirk lost consciousness his last vision was of Dehner standing there, gazing on the Vulcan with undisguised, overwhelming awe.

Dehner knew as she entered the cell with Spock that she had made the choice to join him in his great design for the universe. He led her to a mirror, where she watched with ultimate joy as her own eyes took on the silver hue of a near-god.

Kirk woke with a blinding headache and an aching soul. Piper was bending over him, and Kirk wondered why out of the three of them the elderly doctor had been the first to recover.

"Kelso's dead," said Piper, and Kirk knew that Spock had killed him because of the self-destruct. That Spock could actually kill told him more than anything else that his old friend was lost irretrievably.

Kirk got to his feet. "It's my fault," he said. He took the phaser rifle from the floor where Mitchell had dropped it, and once more his hold on reality began to flee as the realisation came that the dreadful decision, if he could make it, would have to be taken soon. And still he did not know if he could do it.

The being who had once been Spock of Vulcan strode through the barren landscape of Delta Vega with Elizabeth Dehner closely following, his willing acolyte. Eventually they halted. Spock seemed to be waiting for her to say something, but all she could see was the hostility of their surroundings - the change in her was not yet complete.

"It would take a miracle to survive here," she murmured apprehensively.

"Then I shall make one," was the Vulcan's bald statement. With a mere wave of his hand he caused a lush oasis to appear - exactly the scene that would appear most attractive in that place to a Human. Dehner understood he had done it to demonstrate to her the scope his powers now encompassed.

Then he talked to her about how she could share in the power to make the universe what it should be according to the dictates of logic and order which was now his ideal, unfettered by the Human half of him which the metamorphosis had overpowered. Now she had not a shred of doubt that he had the power to do it, and she could not deny how it appealed to her. The rightness of his vision overwhelmed her.

Spock stiffened; he could sense Kirk's approach. "A visitor," he told her. "Go to him. Talk to him. Now that you are changing it is best that you see how unimportant they are. You will enjoy being a god."

She looked at him sharply.

"Blasphemy? No," he replied gently. He did not believe it required further explanation, because by many standards that was exactly what he had become, and if he was to order the universe correctly, that was what its millions had to believe.

Dehner nodded in understanding, then went to do his bidding.

Kirk tracked them, phaser rifle in hand. He knew he had to do that which he most feared, and only the thought that Spock in his right mind would surely have wanted him to do it carried him onward. It was an irreversible decision now, anyway - he had given the order that if he did not return within 12 hours, the Enterprise was to recommend to the Federation that the planet be subjected to a deadly bombardment of neutron radiation. But still his soul rebelled within him, and the grief was almost more than he could bear.

"Can you hear me, James?" A disembodied voice echoed to him through the rocks. Spock's voice unmistakably, but now changed so much it chilled him to the marrow.

"You cannot see me - I am not there. If you follow the right path you will soon come to me."

Kirk halted, a wave of utter dejection threatening to overcome him completely. What if he couldn't stop Spock? What if it was too late? And what if, when he came to the final moment, he found that he did have the chance to kill Spock, and he couldn't do it? Again dizziness swept through him - unconsciousness and more threatened to take him. But he recovered, and as his head stopped swimming he found Dehner standing in front of him. He could see that already the dreadful change was overtaking her; He was not at all surprised to see the silver eyes in her face too.

"Yes," she said. "It just took a little longer for it to happen to me."

He had known what she would say, knew the pattern the conversation would take; but still he had to try.

"You *must* help me, before it goes too far," he pleaded.

"What he is doing is right, for him and for me."

"And for Humanity? You're still Human - at least partly."

"No!"

"You are, or you wouldn't be here talking to me."

"Earth is unimportant. Before long we'll be where it would have taken mankind millions of years to reach."

"But Spock's *Vulcan*! Have you thought about what that entails? And what will he learn in getting there? Will he know how to use the power? Despite all his intelligence, will he have the wisdom? He's changed - can't you see that? He's not really Spock any longer."

"Please go back while you can." Dehner sounded sad, almost as though she wavered a little.

Kirk tried again, in desperation, tried to get her to see things as she once would have done, appealed to the psychiatrist she had been, but all to no avail. Although he sensed her uncertainty, still she was unmoveable.

"He's coming," said Dehner.

"Watch him," pleaded Kirk. "Hang on to being Human for one minute longer."

Then Spock stood in front of them, all-powerful and terrifying.

"I'm disappointed in you, Dr. Dehner."

So - Spock too had sensed how close Kirk had been to swaying her. He looked at Kirk, a regard so alien and cold it brought Kirk near to tears. He lifted the phaser rifle and aimed it at the Vulcan...

... and could not pull the trigger.

With a gesture Spock caused the rifle to fly from Kirk's hand. The nausea returned, and Kirk's increasingly hazy sense hardly reported the next words the Vulcan spoke. "I've been contemplating the death of an old friend," he said.

Kirk looked upwards, as though Spock had directed his vision, and

saw the overhanging rock poised, waiting. He turned to look where Spock indicated, and saw an open grave and a tombstone. His. With a sorrow deeper than he had thought anyone could experience and live, Kirk realised the truth - Spock was insane. Totally, irreversibly insane.

The rocks began to tumble. Dehner shouted, telling him to stop.

"Morals are for men, not for gods," was the Vulcan's judgement.

"A god still has frailties!" Kirk fell to his knees. He couldn't stand and didn't know whether Spock did it or whether he was close to the end. He knew it had to do with that decision he just couldn't make. Did it matter any more? He was sure Spock was going to kill him. The neutron bombardment would put an end to the planet, and to Spock and Dehner. At least he would not have to live on, without Spock...

But what was Dehner doing? Lightning came from her hand, the deadly fire hitting the Vulcan full in the chest. He reeled, but was not overcome. Then he returned her onslaught, with a power so deadly she could do nothing but fall. Kirk ran to her.

"I'm sorry," were the only words she gasped.

Then Kirk realised that she was dead. Spock, his gentle friend, had killed her.

He turned to look at Spock, an accusation on his lips. The Vulcan leant against a rock outcropping, seemingly exhausted - fighting Dehner had drained him.

When he realised the eyes that met his were brown, not silver, Kirk didn't stop to think. He launched himself into attack, and knew he was fighting for his life, and much more. He had to forget it was Spock he fought, impossible as it was - but Human strength was no match for Vulcan, even given the momentary absence of his friend's overwhelming powers, and Kirk needed all his agility and skill to avoid the deadly blows aimed at him.

Back and forth they rolled, Spock almost gaining the upper hand countless times, but Kirk's desperation kept him alive - just. There was blood on his face, but he hardly noticed it, or the tears which threatened. Then Spock, weakened still by the battle with Dehner, made one small mistake of judgement, and Kirk had him down.

With despair surrounding him Kirk pinned Spock to the ground and raised a heavy rock in both hands, knowing in his soul he had to use it.

"Spock - forgive me!"

The anguished words escaped him even as he hesitated for that vital fraction of a second; then the waves of nausea returned as he saw the silver cast return to the Vulcan's eyes, and he realised in his heart that despite all that was at stake he would not have been able to do it.

Spock threw him off as if he was no more than a rag doll. Kirk lay there stunned both from the fall and from the black coma which threatened him again. He couldn't do it... he couldn't... and he knew it would mean his death...

Spock came, and from somewhere Kirk found the strength to get up and dodge, even as his head swam and his senses reeled. The fight began again, somehow more earnestly deadly than before.

Such a fight he had never had. The battle raged on between the two of them, but the changed Spock was all-powerful, and it was all Kirk could do to keep alive. And not for much longer - all his skill and strength were no match for those of his omnipresent opponent. He knew that whatever he did the end would come soon, and witnessing the god-like abilities the Vulcan now displayed, he doubted if even a neutron radiation bombardment would halt him. What had he done? He knew what he *should* have done. Would the galaxy have to pay for his inability?

They both fell into the open grave, and by some miracle Kirk was out of it first. His hands found the fallen phaser rifle, and he saw the rock face directly above where the Vulcan stood. Spock's face showed he saw the chance Kirk had - his last chance to do it.

But still he could not. He sank to the ground, dropping the rifle, knowing it was all over, and realised as if from a distance that his face was wet. He sensed Spock coming, and waited for the Vulcan to deliver the death blow.

But it did not come. He looked up, and could not believe the Vulcan's gentle expression, so incongruous with the silver eyes.

"Jim," he said in a voice so full of emotion Kirk knew he could not really be hearing it, "did you not realise that I, too, no matter what change overcame me, would be unable to kill you? I tell you now that I cannot. Not even now. And in your heart would you really ever believe that I would leave you to make such a decision alone? I could not do that either, my friend. Perhaps you have, after all, still made the right decision, for you should know that I would rather die than kill you."

Kirk looked up at him, not quite understanding.

"Yes, Jim," Spock told him. "Between the two of us, we have won."

"Jim! Jim, can you hear me? Spock - he's coming round."

Kirk could hear McCoy's familiar voice as if from a great distance. Weakly, he opened his eyes.

"You were captured by Tlexorites, Jim - they used the illegal Transolith drug on you." Spock gave him the information he needed. Spock - the old, unchanged Spock.

Untold relief flooded Kirk as he began to understand what had happened. "Then it was all a vision?" he asked, hardly able to believe that it had, after all, been a terrible nightmare. "And I survived?" The expressions on his friends' faces told him they had not expected him to.

"We always knew you were tough, Jim," said McCoy. "Whatever the trauma they awakened with that damned drug of theirs, you must have resolved it. They won't be using it on anyone else - not those two, anyway. We've got them in the Brig. They thought they'd covered their tracks, but we've got them, and their agent. That's how Spock found where you were. That travel company are going to be in hot water, too - hiring you a faulty shuttle. If I get my hands on them..."

McCoy's relief was showing itself in a familiar way, and Kirk felt himself wanting to grin. In the vision he'd thought he'd never want to

smile again.

"Whatever the trauma, Jim, you overcame it," said Spock.

"Yes, Jim, you beat them," McCoy added. "I might have known you'd be the one in a thousand that would."

Kirk shook his head. "We beat them," he said, looking at Spock, who raised an enquiring eyebrow.

"Remember Delta Vega, Spock, and what happened to Gary Mitchell?" said Kirk. "This time it happened to you."

Spock nodded. He needed no more to realise exactly what trauma Kirk had faced - and what decision. But he didn't ask what Kirk had decided or how he had resolved it all. Jim would tell him in his own good time.

"I'll tell you about it one day, Spock," Kirk smiled. "But for now all I'll say is - the difference was the difference between Gary Mitchell and you. You saved me, Spock."


"I understand, Jim," was all Spock said. And Kirk knew he probably did.

"Well," said McCoy, "when you *do* tell Spock what it was all about, maybe you'd do me the favour of telling me too, because I don't know what in the universe you two are going on about. But as for now, Captain, we are leaving you so you can get some rest."


They went then, and Kirk settled down in the empty Sickbay to try and obey McCoy's order, but the images of the vision would not quite leave him. It was true, Spock *had* saved him - or their friendship had. Yet he couldn't decide if he really *had* resolved it all or not...

His last thought before he drifted off into a peaceful sleep was that, whatever hard decisions he had to make in the future, he'd better make sure he had Spock with him - and McCoy. Because the truth of it was, his friends helped him to be what he was. And when he woke he was going to tell them just that.

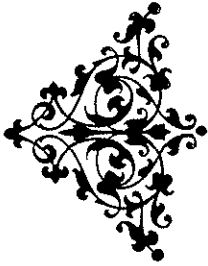
UNDERSTANDING



Reared on an alien planet
So different to my own,
With other customs, other ways,
Other beliefs. The way you see
Emotion is strange to me -
I could not bear to live
As you do, yet to you
My way is just as strange,
As hard to comprehend.
Yet since the day we met
We both have tried, and trying
Have learned each has a friend.



Sheila Clark



The Trip

by

Sharon O'Doherty



"Spock! Where are you?"

Spock heard his mother calling him and, obedient as always, he replied at once. "Here, Mother - in the garden."

"Come in for a moment. Your father has something to say to you."

Spock sighed a small sigh. "I'll be back later, my friend," he said to his sehlat, with whom he had been enjoying a particularly animated game of wrestling. The sehlat grunted, disappointed.

As Spock walked up to the house he went over in his mind his activities of the past week. He could think of no reason why his father should want to see him so urgently; he had conducted himself with perfect propriety, and so that eliminated a possible chastisement. Spock was curious - a feeling he could never quite control.

As he entered the living room he saw both his parents were waiting for him. His mother was sitting on the long couch. He noticed that she was trying hard to contain some inner excitement, and looked expectantly at his father.

"You wanted me, Father?"

"Yes, Spock. I have some information for you which I think you will find pleasing."

Spock's ten-year-old ears pricked up. "Indeed, Father?"

"I have received a communication from the Terran Ambassador to Vulcan. As you know, he was recalled to Earth recently for a series of conferences on his work while he has been on Vulcan. He feels that my presence at these meetings would greatly increase the understanding of both our races for each other. Therefore he has issued an invitation to me to visit Earth - London, to be precise - and the invitation has been extended to include both your mother and yourself."

"Isn't it wonderful?" broke in Amanda. "At last you will be able to visit my home planet. I have longed to take you, and now the opportunity has come."

Spock was delighted. Now he would be able to see for himself the home of his mother. Not only that, but in the company of his father as well! It was too good to be true. He itched to set off. Anticipation flowed through his veins, but in spite of his excitement he controlled himself well.

"When will we be leaving?"

"In a fortnight." Sarek was pleased at his son's control. "We intend to stay a few months, so the Ambassador has arranged for you to

attend school on Earth. It will be beneficial for you to experience the upbringing of Terran children and to see how they conduct themselves."

"Yes, Father. I will look forward to the visit. I am sure it will be very educational."

The last thing on Spock's mind at that moment was the educational advantages of the trip. He was thinking of the people he would meet. He had always been a lonely boy. Because of his Terran blood the other Vulcan children treated him as an outsider, and a bit of an accident of birth. Since he had passed the Kahs-wan and had chosen the Vulcan way of life at the age of seven all open hostility had ceased, and two of the other boys had even become conversation companions. But not friends. Spock knew that the attention bestowed on him by Silar and Sehrad was only because of his exceptional adeptness at computer physics. But, in spite of his disappointment at their motivation, he knew that he needed these companions. He had always seen Earth as the place where friends would be, if they were anywhere. He knew that on Earth to be a member of two races was no stigma. Perhaps there, at last, he would be accepted.

Amanda was not deceived by Spock's control. She could see the gleam of delight in his eyes.

Oh dear, she thought with sudden misgivings, I hope we are doing the right thing.

As the craft slowly descended towards Earth Spock was almost beside himself. Sarek forgave his son his display of excitement, taking into account the extraordinary circumstances.

"Spock, sit down," he admonished. "If you press yourself against the porthole any harder you may very well reach Earth before the space ship."

Spock obeyed. He knew his father did not really mean what he said, but he saw his mother look rather alarmed. They landed smoothly, and were welcomed by the Ambassador himself.

"Welcome to Earth, Sarek," said Toomey, shaking his hand. "Lady Amanda, a pleasure as always. I hope your journey was comfortable?"

"Yes indeed, Ambassador," replied Amanda.

"This is my son, Spock. I do not believe you have met," said Sarek, indicating where Spock stood.

"Greetings, Ambassador Toomey," Spock said, giving the Vulcan salute. "I am pleased to make your acquaintance at last."

Toomey returned the salute creditably well. He liked Spock instantly - he had a directness and confidence about him that wasn't in the least offensive, even in a boy so young. He turned his attention back to Sarek.

"I hope you will enjoy your stay on Earth. Everything has been arranged. If you will come this way?"

The Vulcan family obediently followed their guide to a waiting hover-car.

"I have arranged for your luggage to be sent directly to your house," Toomey explained. "I'm sure you would like to go there at once - you must be tired after your journey."

"I am, rather, but I would like to unpack and get settled in as soon as possible," said Amanda. "However," she added, knowing how Sarek felt about the mayhem that accompanied unpacking, "perhaps my husband and Spock would like to see a little of London."

Sarek took the hint and readily agreed.

After making sure that Amanda was installed comfortably in their new home and happily engaged in getting things organised, they set off. Toomey took them on a sight-seeing tour in the hover-car.

Spock's eyebrows climbed higher and higher as he observed the life bustling around him. On Vulcan everything moved at a sedate controlled pace, but here it was quite the opposite. People were everywhere, rushing about their business at a speed that made Spock's head swim to see them. He was enchanted by the pigeons in Trafalgar Square; he noticed that people were throwing something on the ground, and the pigeons were picking it up. He looked questioningly at Toomey.

"Bread," he answered. "People have been coming here to feed the pigeons for centuries. It's an old custom that never died out."

Sarek looked disapproving, but Spock resolved to try his hand at feeding the birds before he went home. Strictly as a scientific experiment, of course.

He looked with awe at the Houses of Parliament, now out of use but carefully preserved behind a transparent force-field, but he was really taken by the huge clock.

"Incredible, isn't it?" said Toomey. "Big Ben was typical of time indicators at one time. So unreliable, and easily broken. Frankly, I don't know how they managed to be punctual."

By the time Toomey had finished, Sarek - though he would never have admitted it - and Spock were too tired to absorb any more. They were both pleased to reach home. Amanda met them at the door. Mysteriously, all the clutter had disappeared and the house was indeed organised.

"Did you have a good time?" she asked expectantly.

"I cannot say for certain," said Spock, "but it was a fascinating experience."

A week later Spock was taken to school. It was a large pyramidal building situated opposite Hyde Park. The sun shone on its white surface and was absorbed by its smokey windows. Somewhere in the bowels of the building it was converted into energy and used by the school to power its lighting and heating system.

On arrival Spock and Amanda were taken to the Principal's office. On the way Amanda took a final chance to advise her son.

"Remember, Terran children are very different from Vulcans, so don't get upset if they are a little awkward with you at first. Make allowances for them, and don't be surprised if they seem totally illogical - it's natural for them."

"Don't worry, Mother. I will conduct myself as a true Vulcan."

"Yes, dear - but not too much."

Spock stared at his mother and raised a puzzled eyebrow. Really, sometimes she could say the most illogical things.

After a short talk with Amanda the Principal offered to take her to her waiting transport. Turning to Spock, Mr. Vinchley said,

"If you don't mind waiting here, Spock, your Tutor will be here shortly to take charge of you."

As Spock saw his mother leaving he suddenly felt very alone. He pushed his insecurity away, chastising himself for being illogical.

The Tutor arrived, a small woman in the mid-forties, and very plump. She seemed pleasant enough, but something about her suggested that she could be strict when she felt it necessary. She introduced herself.

"I am Miss Butterly. You will be in my Tutor Group while you are here."

"I am Spock. I am pleased to meet you," said Spock. He had found that the Vulcan form of greeting was a little formal for everyday use, so he had adopted the more commonly used Terran phrase.

"And I am pleased to meet you," replied the teacher, smiling.

She took him down a number of corridors. Students on their way to various classrooms stopped and stared at him as he passed. Miss Butterly glared at them and they disappeared in confusion. Spock pretended not to notice. Finally they reached a door that bore the legend, 'Tutor Group A1 Junior'.

"This is the classroom," explained the teacher, and she opened the door. As they entered the room fell silent. Fifteen pairs of eyes turned their gazes upon them, and Spock began to feel uncomfortable. The teacher spoke.

"Class, this is Spock. He comes from Vulcan. As you know he will be in our Tutor Group while he is on Earth. I know you will make him feel welcome." She looked at them meaningfully.

"Yes, ma'am," they chorused.

"Good. That is your desk down there, Spock," said Miss Butterly, pointing to the back of the room.

Spock located his desk and sank down gratefully into his seat. Still he couldn't escape the inquisitive stares of his classmates. He was surprised at the lack of courtesy - he knew that on Terra as well as on Vulcan staring was considered bad manners. The teacher called them to attention, and the school day continued.

In the following weeks Spock found that instead of integrating with the other children as he had so hoped, the differences between them were proving irreconcilable. Apart from the physical and behavioural aspects it soon became apparent that mentally he was far superior. Because of his quick mind and Vulcan education he found that he was way above the

standard of the class. Mathematical problems that took the others considerable time to work out only took him a few seconds to resolve in his head. Time after time he answered all the problems before the others had even picked up their styluses. Resentment against him grew. The other children felt that he was purposely making them look stupid. The Tutors began to ask him not to answer before the others were ready, and eventually didn't ask him at all.

Spock took refuge from the fact that he was being ignored by researching Earth's history on the small computer that was a feature of every desk in the school. It occupied him, for which the Tutors were grateful, and it gave him a valuable insight into the emotional involvement of the Human species. It amazed him that the Human race had survived so many violent and barbarous times. Vulcan had had an equally violent past, but the Vulcans, with the teachings of Surak, had evolved into a peaceful society while the Terrans were still hitting each other over the head with bones.

During recreation periods he became the butt of the childrens' cruelty and dislike. They never became violent, but the taunts about his appearance became nearly intolerable. He took it all stoically, and never answered back or showed how much they hurt him. He began to think almost lovingly of Vulcan. Its discipline and tranquillity were what he longed for. He even longed to see Silar and Sehrad - here, he didn't even have conversation companions. Spock sighed, and felt a familiar sensation. Loneliness.

The situation reached a climax on his last day. He was just about to leave the classroom, not without some relief, when he found Thompson in his way. Thompson was the largest boy in the class, and it was from him that Spock had received the worst baiting.

Spock considered him thoughtfully. Intellectually the boy was a non-starter, but with his size he didn't need brains - he just bullied to get what he wanted. Spock decided he didn't want a showdown, and opted for diplomacy. He cleared his throat.

"Excuse me, please. You are blocking my path."

"Excuse me, please," mimicked the boy.

Spock became aware that the others were closing in a group around him. He had the uncomfortable sensation that this confrontation had been planned.

"Polite, aren't you, Vulcan - but then you always are to people who matter."

"I do not understand," Spock said truthfully.

"It must be the only thing you haven't understood since you came here." This was ventured by a measly little boy who was one of Thompson's most eager followers.

"Yeah," said Thompson. "We're sick of you licking up to the Tutors, always having the right answer - and what about your tale-telling this morning?"

Spock cast his mind back to the incident in question. Before the Tutor had arrived that morning the class, with the exception of Spock, had been indulging in a little horseplay. In the general confusion two

of the specimen jars kept on a shelf behind the Tutor's desk had been knocked over and smashed. Miss Butterly, on her arrival, had demanded to know who was responsible. Having been greeted by silence from the Terran children she had asked Spock. Since he had strong principles about lying, he had told her. The culprit had been brought to justice; unfortunately, the culprit had been Thompson.

"I did not tale-tell," said Spock defensively. "The Tutor asked for information and I supplied it. It would have been illogical to refuse, or to attempt to falsify the facts." Spock had been horrified at the lack of discipline the Terrans exercised, and wondered at their facility for lying.

"On Vulcan," he continued, "we are taught not to lie, regardless of the ensuing consequences."

"I'm sick of Vulcan, and I'm sick of you!" Thompson shouted. "And I'll show you what I think of your honesty!"

He drew back his fist and before Spock could dodge, punched him full on the mouth. Spock flew backwards into the arms of his classmates, who promptly righted him and put him back into the path of the bully. He put his hand to his mouth and felt a trickle of blood - one of his teeth didn't seem to be all that secure either.

"Look!" screamed one of the girls. "He bleeds green!"

"Devil! Satan!" yelled another boy.

"Alien go back home! Alien go back home!" The chant was taken up by the crowd that surrounded him.

Spock refrained from telling them that that was precisely what he was attempting to do. He looked around for an avenue of escape. He was no coward, but the odds were against him, and he had no intention of exposing himself to serious damage if he could avoid it.

The bully was advancing on him, so Spock turned to meet him. The boy was as clumsy as he was stupid, and Spock had no trouble avoiding the punches he was throwing. Then without warning the bully changed tactics and lashed out with his foot. It caught Spock full in the stomach and he sank to his knees, gasping for breath.

Thompson howled in triumph and jumped on his victim. Blows rained down on Spock's body and he began to lose consciousness. His attempts to defend himself proved ineffectual against the onslaught of the raging Human. Then he heard a yell. Through the haze that enveloped him he saw a form push its way to his side, and felt it pull Thompson off him.

"Stop it, you big brute - you'll kill him." The voice was full of rage. Spock heard the sound of flesh hitting flesh. "There - it's not so nice when someone does it to you, is it? As for the rest of you cowards, you just stood by shouting encouragement and let this creep beat up someone smaller than him. A fine example of Humanity you are! Get to hell out of here before I tear you all apart with my bare hands."

The blood-lust dying from their faces, the children realised what they had done. Terrified of the consequences, they needed no second urging. They ran.

Spock felt himself being picked up and placed on the long Tutor's table. He heard the sound of water being run and then felt a cold cloth being gently placed on his forehead. He opened his eyes slowly, and

found himself gazing into the face of a boy of about fifteen. Spock recognised him as a Prefect from one of the older classes. He had a shock of unruly gold/brown hair, and brown eyes, which at that moment were full of concern.

"How do you feel?" he asked. "Anything broken, do you think?"

Spock closed his eyes again and examined himself. "No," he said at last, "I am relatively undamaged. A few bruises, but that is all."

"Thank goodness," the older boy sighed with relief. "I thought you were a goner the way Thompson set on you like a wolf with a dead sheep; and as for the others - I could murder them."

"No," Spock said quickly. "It is not their fault. They were angry with me, and were not in control. I am so different from what they know, they did not understand."

The other boy's eyes rounded in surprise. "You're being very forgiving about all this."

"Just logical. People always fear and are angry at what they do not understand," replied Spock. He sat up and suppressed a yelp of pain. He felt as if a two-ton sehlat had sat on him.

His rescuer introduced himself. "My name is Kirk. George Samuel Kirk. Actually, most people call me Sam."

"I am called Spock."

"Pleased to meet you, Spock. Can you stand?"

"I believe so." Spock got down from the table gingerly. It hurt a little to move, but not so much that he couldn't control the pain.

Sam looked at him in admiration. *Boy, he really is something, he thought. The way he's carrying on you'd think he had just come in from a walk in the park.* "I think you should see the school doctor," he said aloud. "Just in case of any internal damage."

"Thank you, no. I am quite all right. Besides, it would mean that he would have to report the incident."

"But I'll be reporting it anyway," said Sam, puzzled.

"I would rather you did not." Spock looked pleadingly at him. "Please, I do not wish to make trouble for them. It is my last day here, and I have caused enough disturbance with my presence without causing it in my absence."

"Have it your own way," said Sam resignedly. *Funny, he thought, I expected him to say that.* He looked critically at the small Vulcan. "Well, you're not badly marked at least - just a split lip."

"That is good. I will not worry my mother unduly," said Spock, relieved.

"Let me see you home," Sam offered. "Just in case."

Spock accepted gratefully. In all honesty he was afraid that Thompson might be waiting for him, and he was sure that in another altercation he would not be so lucky.

As they walked towards Spock's home Spock felt himself warming to Sam. The other boy was explaining that he was in London for a year's study.

"I live in a small town in Iowa, America. I'm not really fond of big city life. I'd much rather live on a farm, but cities are rather hard to avoid. My father thinks that a year in London will do wonders for me, cultural saturation and all that. Personally, I can take it or leave it, and I'm so full of it now I'd rather leave it. My brother Jim, now - he loves it. Adores Old Earth history and culture - thrives on it, in fact. Dad has promised him a year's study as soon as he's old enough. He can hardly wait." Sam's face became thoughtful. "He's a bit of a contradiction, really."

"Indeed? In what way?" asked Spock. He was relishing the conversation.

"Well, in spite of his interest in Old Earth he loves Starships and space travel. He wants to join Starfleet when he leaves school, and eventually become Captain of one of those battlecruisers. Funny thing is, he'll probably make it. He has the drive and the brains." Sam laughed. "I'll probably end up colonising a new planet or something - at least it would give me a chance to do some farming."

Spock was sorry to see that they had reached his house. "Would you like to come in?" he offered.

"No, thanks anyway. I'll have to be going. You're sure you're okay?"

"Quite. Thank you for your help. I am sure that if you had not come I would have been in a worse state."

"Don't mention it. Sorry again for what happened. Please don't think that all Humans behave like that."

"You have made that thought impossible," replied Spock somewhat awkwardly, being unused to such intimacy.

Sam blushed. "Well, maybe we'll meet again sometime."

"I hope so." Spock impulsively held up his hand in the Vulcan salute. "Live long and prosper, Sam Kirk."

After a moment Sam imitated him. "And you, Spock of Vulcan." He grinned, turned the salute into a wave and headed off down the street.

Spock watched the retreating back of his newly-found and newly-lost friend. He thought of how nearly his only hope in life had been shattered, but had been rescued by one boy whom he might never see again, but would always remember.



the Gnaar

by

Christine Hall

"Where is he, Scotty?"

The almost shouted question hung on the heavy air. But the man addressed so urgently could not meet his Captain's eye, and James Kirk felt the cold hand of fear clutch his heart. It could not be that he had worked so hard, come so far, waited so long, and all for nothing!

Kirk thought back over the long months, to how it had all begun.

It had all started very quietly and pleasantly. The Starship Enterprise had just completed a rather wearying period of duty, star-mapping in the outer reaches of the galaxy, and had been granted a spell of leave for rest and recreation.

The ship had gone into orbit around the pleasure planet Dorsina, and, in turn, parties of the crew had beamed down to it to make use of its many facilities.

Dorsina was an unusual place. Only a small planet, barely bigger than Earth's moon, it had been well developed by a consortium of entrepreneurs with a good eye for business.

They had realised that, in this quadrant of the galaxy, there had been - until they stepped in - no place for a recreation-seeking spacemen to go to spend all the credits he had been accumulating over long periods of duty. So they had acquired the rights to this small planet which, fortunately, had been found to be devoid both of any advanced life form and of any profitable mineral resources, and had gone on to develop it very fully as a recreational haven.

They had spent a considerable fortune on landscaping its climatically better side with parks and lakes, and areas suitable for many varied outdoor pursuits, and had utilised its darker, colder side to build pleasure palaces of every description, to cater for all possible needs or desires.

With great foresight and shrewdness, they had allocated a large sum of money to setting up a force of efficient and unobtrusive men to 'police' the place. This worked extremely well. Any incipient trouble was quickly dealt with, and anyone who persisted, by his behaviour, in spoiling the pleasure of others, was quietly but firmly removed, and kept in comfortable captivity until reasonableness returned.

All this gave the place a fine atmosphere of relaxation. Officers did not need to bother about keeping an eye on their men, for this was done for them, and they were informed discreetly if any of their crew had been taken into custody. So everyone felt free to enjoy themselves in whatever way they wished.

Captain James T. Kirk, of the Enterprise, had taken full advantage

of the opportunity. He had insisted that all his officers took leave periods ashore, even Spock, his Vulcan First Officer, who usually showed no interest in shore leave and was quite content to stay aboard and work at some project there.

Kirk had coaxed him into going, and the Vulcan had been quite surprised at the relaxation he had found, just strolling through the natural-looking parks with his friend, and observing the wide variety of wild fowl, swimming peacefully in their natural habitat on the small lakes.

Then Kirk had persuaded - nay, almost bullied - him into having a look at the other side of the planet. He had dragged Spock from pleasure palace to pleasure palace, from one bar to another, and to various other places whose concealed purpose the Vulcan did not care to speculate upon.

Spock did not really care for all that, and would rather have been busy on the ship, but on the other hand, he considered, the study of Humans at play had a certain fascination, and he reasoned that careful observation of this might help him to understand them better.

So for that reason - and for the pleasure of Kirk's company - he had acquiesced, and had made a real effort not to look disapprovingly at some of the sillier behaviour that he had seen.

They had finally reached a brightly-lit bar cum dance hall, and found quite a number of their own crew already there. Scott was well ensconced at a corner table, with a bottle and glass before him. Chekov was on the dance floor, engaged in a lively, if somewhat over-enthusiastic, partnership with a well endowed redhead, and various others of the younger officers had also found companions to dance with.

Acknowledging cheerful greetings, Kirk made his way over to join his Chief Engineer at his table. The Vulcan followed closely behind, endeavouring, by agile movements, not to become entangled in the wilder gyrations of the dancers.

"Seen Bones about, Scotty?" Kirk asked.

"Aye, sir," replied the Engineer, his voice only slightly slurred, for the evening was still young. "He was here earlier, but he was called back to the ship. An emergency appendicitis, I think."

Kirk was a little disappointed at the news. Dr. McCoy was a better companion for this kind of pleasure than Spock, and he would miss his company. Mind you, Spock had been very good, and hadn't looked too disapproving. But if they'd both been there, there might have been some amusing repartee. Still, if there had been a medical emergency, McCoy was where he ought to be, and as Captain, Kirk knew better than most that duty had to supersede pleasure. There would undoubtedly be other evenings.

He and Spock sank into chairs beside Scott. With their backs to the wall, they could survey the mingled crowds enjoying themselves. Kirk smiled to himself as he watched the energetic gyrations of Chekov and his redhead.

"Watch it, lad," he whispered under his breath. "You'll tie yourself in knots if you're not careful."

A waiter came over and took their order for drinks. Spock was all ready to refuse, but Kirk insisted that he had at least one.

"You can make it last all night if you want to," he said, "but you can't sit empty-handed, not in a place like this."

Spock gave in gracefully. As his Captain had suggested, he could - and would - make the drink last a long time, but perhaps it would make him appear a little more sociable.

When the drinks came, they sat sipping them in companionable silence, for the noisy music made conversation difficult, and the flashing lights distracted the attention too.

But, thought Kirk, there is considerable relaxation just in the knowledge that there is nothing demanding my immediate attention. There was nothing that *had* to be done or thought about, no decisions to be made that were any more thought-provoking than whether to make his next drink a repeat of the first, or to make a change. He leaned back contentedly, feeling relaxed and at ease.

He glanced across at his friend. The Vulcan also seemed relaxed, but then, *he* could achieve that state more easily, by sheer mental control. Kirk, who could read the slightest flicker of emotion on that normally impassive face, smiled to himself as he watched.

The Vulcan evidently found the music not much to his taste or the comfort of his sensitive hearing, and it was clear that some of the erratic behaviour of those dancing was a source of real puzzlement to him. *I bet he's wondering what kind of enjoyment Humans get out of such odd activity,* thought Kirk. He read the incredulity shown in the raised eyebrow, and smiled with genuine amusement.

The ease and relaxation of the situation made the interruption all the more startling and devastating.

The doors to the bar burst open with a resounding crash. All eyes were drawn there, and showed total astonishment at the sight of the intruders. As well they might, for the newcomers made a considerable impact on the senses, even those dulled by alcohol, as they swarmed in.

They had to duck to clear the doorway, for their height varied from ten to twelve feet, dwarfing the Humans before them. They walked upright on strong back legs, and wore some clothing, a kind of chain mail and leather tabard, but their form was patently feline. Their bodies were covered in tawny-orange fur, their ears were sharp and pointed, their eyes gleaming amber above a longish black nose and a cruel mouth with small, sharp-looking teeth.

They snarled fiercely as they advanced into the room, long slim tails swishing behind them. Their upper paws, more developed than a cat's and more like huge hands, began grabbing the nearest Humans. The shouts of the men and the terrified screams of the girls did not seem to deter them one bit.

It was soon evident that their aim was to capture rather than kill, for as soon as the first ones had collected two or perhaps three men, throwing them over their shoulders or tucking them under their strong arms, they made for the door, disappearing with their booty, only to be replaced by others eager for their turn. It was men they wanted - the girls were thrown or pushed unceremoniously aside, their screams and shrieks ignored.

One, who seemed to be the leader, distinguishable only by the wide gold chain dangling in front of his more elaborately-decorated tabard, appeared to be directing the operation, pointing out likely-looking

victims to his troops.

The creatures were so strong that all resistance was crushed effortlessly. Although most of the men were fit and well-trained, and so tried desperately to avoid capture, without weapons they were as effective as toddlers trying to fight twenty-stone wrestlers. Brave as they were, they were powerless against such superior force, and one after another they were caught and carried off.

Chekov and Sulu, among the dancers on the floor, were quickly seized and carried off, kicking and struggling, one across the shoulders of a massive creature, the other tucked under his arm, wriggling and beating vainly against the chain-mailed back.

Scott, Spock and Kirk were on their feet at the back of the hall as the fearsome warriors advanced, each determined to resist capture if they could. Elated and excited at the ease of their success, the attackers were not impressed by their defiant stance. One grabbed for Scott, who nimbly dodged his massive reaching paw. Enraged, the creature leaped forward, grabbed the unfortunate Engineer and shook him violently before tossing him over his shoulder, grabbing another running man by the back of his uniform and bearing both his captives effortlessly away.

A massive orange-furred hand reached for Kirk and caught his arm. Kirk fought back and tried to pull away. The creature yanked him angrily, and Kirk slammed against a pillar. He yelled in pain as he felt his arm break. He began to fall, clutching the injury. The Leader, who had seen the incident, stepped forward and dealt his subordinate a resounding backhander.

He snarled a string of guttural sounds. "You dolt, they are useless if they are damaged! Leave him - get another."

The creature dropped Kirk, who slumped to the floor, and turned on Spock, who had been trying desperately to help his Captain. It grabbed for him with both paws, but the Vulcan's speed of reaction let him dodge out of reach. But luck was against him; his foot slipped on the remains of a spilt drink and he fell heavily. Two huge paws grabbed him and hauled him upright. He resisted fiercely, pitting all his considerable strength against his large attacker.

The watching Leader, perhaps impressed by the Vulcan's spirited resistance, decided to take a hand. "He's a good strong one. I'll take him," he grunted.

His huge paws reached for Spock from behind, and closed round his neck. As the creature's grip tightened, Spock fought for breath. But his efforts were useless against the vice-like hold of his adversary, and he felt his senses dimming as the darkness swept in on him. The Leader waited until his victim went limp in his hands, then lifted him easily and passed him to the waiting warrior.

Kirk half rose in an effort to help his friend, but a fierce swinging blow from the Leader sent him flying back against the wall. As he slid down it and slumped unconscious amid the debris of broken chairs and tables, Kirk's last glimpse was of the Vulcan's limp body dangling over a creature's orange-furry shoulder as he disappeared through the doorway.

Spock returned to consciousness slowly and reluctantly. His throat

felt bruised and swollen and his body ached. He did a quick mental inventory of his condition, and found to his relief that the damage appeared minimal.

He opened his eyes slowly. The light was rather dim, but he could easily see familiar faces peering anxiously at him.

"Are you all right, Mr. Spock?" came Scott's gruff voice.

Spock gathered his resources back under his control. "Affirmative, Mr. Scott," he said calmly, and endeavoured to raise himself from the hard metallic floor on which he was lying. Helping hands assisted him, and he leaned back against the wall to take stock of the situation.

A great number of men - he estimated two hundred or more - were sitting about in what appeared to be a large metal room, empty of all furnishings. He felt the throbbing sensations in the bulkhead at his back, and deduced correctly that they were in the cargo hold of some craft.

Scott sat beside him on his right, and Sulu and Chekov crouched on his left. Among those nearest beyond them were many in Starfleet uniform, and further off others whom he did not recognise, some wearing uniforms of other services, and some in civilian dress. All looked subdued, and many, apprehensive.

"Have you taken a tally, Mr. Scott?" asked the Vulcan.

"Not yet," replied Scott.

"I suggest you do so now," said Spock. "Mr. Sulu, Mr. Chekov, please assist Mr. Scott."

His calmness and assumption of command were having a good effect. The three officers immediately went round, having a quick word with each man in turn, and using some self-designed system of counting. They soon returned to the Vulcan, who committed the results they had obtained to memory, and collated them expertly.

"Two hundred and three men in all; one hundred and forty nine from the Enterprise, twenty-eight from the Vigilant, seventeen from the freighter Wotan, and the remaining nine, Dorsinian workers," he catalogued accurately, registering the fact that he, and Scott, were by far the senior officers.

The time the census had taken had allowed Spock to recover, and to subdue the physical discomfort he had felt on waking.

He rose easily to his feet. Immediately, the eyes of all the men from the Enterprise turned to him. Although none of them actively analysed the thought, his very presence brought them a sense of reassurance. Almost as one man, they rose and gathered round, looking to him for leadership.

A voice with a trace of a tremor in it asked, "What are we going to do, Mr. Spock?"

With his unfailing memory, the Vulcan put a name to the voice and the face, and recognising the young man's real effort to control his fear, answered gently.

"I do not know any more than you do, Ensign Yates," he said. "We must remain alert and see what happens."

"What do they want us for?" asked another voice.

"Speculation is of little value at this stage," replied Spock, and his Vulcan calm must have had some effect, for although all sorts of questions were racing through the minds of the imprisoned men, no more were voiced out loud, and the men settled down to await events.

At intervals, plates of food and jugs of water were pushed through an opening at the bottom of the door. Sufficient was supplied, and it was passed round and shared meticulously.

A few seemed so paralysed with fear that they refused to eat at first, but Spock spoke quietly to them individually, and pointed out that it was their duty to maintain their strength, so that they would not let down their fellows if action were suddenly called for.

Even the civilian workers responded to his authoritative manner, and a much calmer atmosphere developed. The Humans soon lost track of time, but Spock's accurate time sense told him that the journey took them exactly twenty two point seven days, counting in twenty-four hour periods. But as he had no way of assessing the speed that the craft was doing, he could not compute the distance, though he judged that it was a very long way, well out of the known areas of the galaxy.

During that time, they saw nothing of their captors except the furry hands that pushed the food and drink in to them. But when the feel of the ship, the vibrations and the sound began to alter, suggesting to those experienced with space vessels that a holding orbit was being achieved, things changed.

The heavy metal doors were thrown wide open, and a large number of the orange furry creatures entered. Those men who were not already on their feet were roughly pulled upright, and the whole group was hustled and pushed out of the hold and along an echoing corridor into another chamber.

This appeared to contain a mass transportation device. A group of the prisoners, about twenty-five or so, was prodded to a raised section by four of the large creatures. Another one touched a button in the wall, and the whole lot disappeared in a rainbow-coloured glow. After a few moments the glow returned, and the four creatures stepped from the platform to hustle another batch of prisoners onto it. The process was repeated until all had been transported.

Spock and Scott were among the last group, and were secretly relieved to see, when they rematerialised, that they were reunited with the earlier groups, which had included most of the Enterprise men. They looked about them curiously.

The first impression was one of all-over greyness, from the grey dust beneath their feet to the dark grey of nearby cliffs and the paler grey of the sky above them.

They were standing in a large natural hollow, several hundred yards across, ringed by steep dark cliffs hundreds of feet high at the nearer end and petering out to a few feet at the farthest end of the oval-shaped space.

Towards that end there was a stockade of solid posts, and it was towards this that the captured men were hustled. One of the great creatures, apparently on guard, effortlessly opened a heavy door, and

the captives were pushed roughly inside. The door was slammed shut behind them, raising a cloud of the all-pervading grey dust.

The heavy sky above seemed to be darkening rapidly, as if this planet's night was fast approaching, but there was still sufficient light for the newcomers to assess what they saw.

The space within the stockade appeared to be divided by wooden walls into many room-sized areas, each topped with corrugated metal roofs, and in each section men like themselves were crowding in, and jostling for enough space to lie down.

As the new arrivals stared, a figure left one of the spaces and came towards them. As he came nearer, Spock's developed night-vision enabled him to see that it was an Andorian, recognisable by his pale blue skin and horned antennae. However, the alien spoke to them in excellent Terran.

"Night comes quickly here, my friends," he said. "I suggest you find a sleeping place while you still just see. We will answer all your questions when the morning light wakes us all."

His manner seemed friendly, and his advice well-meant, so the newcomers followed it, sharing themselves into the empty rooms and settling down as best they could on the hard ground. They huddled close to such friends as they had or had made, partly for warmth and partly for mutual reassurance against the fears of what the morrow might bring. What little light there had been faded rapidly, and soon all was quiet in the compound except for the sounds of restlessness from those unable to sleep and the snores of those who could.

Sulu and Chekov had acted quickly on the Andorian's advice, and had saved a space in a corner to afford their senior officers a modicum of privacy, fending off those trying to encroach, until Spock and Scott had taken the places close to the wall.

Spock lay still and endeavoured to relax. It would be wise to sleep, he knew, to regain strength for whatever was to come, but for the moment it seemed to be eluding him. Although he had the natural Vulcan aversion to physical contact, he nevertheless found himself gratified by the feel of Scott's sturdy form at his back, partly because of the warmth it was supplying to him, but more, he acknowledged to himself, because he knew that he would receive the dour Scotsman's unstinting loyalty and support in whatever difficulties lay ahead of them.

His thoughts, as they had so often done in the last three weeks, returned to the Enterprise. Although her complement had been depleted by several of her best officers and many of her men, she would not have been disabled. The well-trained crew would quickly cover for those missing wherever they could, and any essential positions would have been quickly filled by recruited staff to keep her in commission. He hoped that she was even now patrolling the galaxy and searching for them.

That would undoubtedly be the first priority with his Captain. Always assuming that he was still in command, of course. The disturbing thought shot into his mind - but he forced himself to drive it out. He knew that Captain Kirk had been hurt in the attack by their ferocious captors, but he did not think that he had been severely injured. McCoy would have looked after him as soon as the ship was alerted and, if he knew his Captain as he thought he did, he was sure that Kirk would have been making instant efforts to find and rescue his abducted crew.

But the intelligent Vulcan was well aware that that was not going

to be an easy task. He had no idea what form of propulsion the attackers' ship had, or how fast it could travel, but they had been a long time on the journey and must have travelled a great distance, probably well out of known areas of space. Tracking the ship and finding this planet, wherever it was, might prove to be beyond the finest powers of the Enterprise, especially as both he and Mr. Scott, who knew her potential best, were both absent.

A loud snore from the other side of the compound interrupted his train of thought, and brought him back to reality. Responding to his own often-expressed logic, that speculation was an unproductive exercise, he concentrated instead on a familiar Vulcan technique, and soon relaxed into restoring sleep.

He woke to the sound of voices and movement around him. Sulu was gently shaking his shoulder to rouse him.

"There seems to be something happening," said the Oriental. Spock rose quickly, the few swift movements enough to ease the stiffness out of his limbs. He moved out into the open, where the men from the other areas seemed to be up and waiting for something.

The Andorian who had greeted them the previous night appeared again.

"Come," he said, moving across the compound. "We go through these gates," he said, pointing, "and get some food."

They followed him as he moved away quickly. As each man passed through a narrow opening, he was handed a metal pan of food and a tin cup of water. On emerging from the stockade, they found that those already served had spread out, finding themselves chosen places to eat their breakfast.

Some sat on boulders, some squatted against the stockade fence, some leaned against the grey cliff walls.

The Andorian led them towards a space on the stockade wall where the early morning light was beginning to warm the rough log timbers. The Enterprise men followed his lead, and sat down to lean their backs against the warm support. They eyed the food in the pans warily.

"It's all right," the Andorian reassured them. "It doesn't look very interesting, but it doesn't taste too bad, and it's quite sustaining. It's vegetarian, too," he added, nodding to the Vulcan.

Using their fingers, as they saw the others doing, the new men sampled the food. It was bland, but not unpleasant, and knowing that they might need the strength it would give them, they set to with determination if not enthusiasm.

While they ate, the friendly Andorian talked.

"My name is Arlom," he said. "My aide, Gren," he added, indicating the other, smaller Andorian who seemed to be his constant shadow. "We were captured by the Gnaar when our scout craft was driven off course by an ion storm."

"The Gnaar," said Scott. "Is that what yon beasties are called, then?"

"Yes," replied Arlom. "Take care not to anger them, my friend, for they are very strong and completely ruthless."

"What do they want of us?" enquired Spock."

"Workers," replied the Andorian simply. "Slave labour to work in the delagmite mines. They seem to require vast quantities of delagmite. It's shipped away in huge freighters every third day. It's not desperately hard work, the stuff is easily dug. With their strength, they could do it three times as easily as us, but they seem to be allergic to the dust - it irritates their skin. If you watch, you'll see them continually shaking and grooming their fur."

At that point, a loud clanking was heard. Two big Gnaar came round pushing before them a heavy box-shaped tub on wheels. The men sitting about got up and put their empty plates and cups into it. Quickly finishing off their water ration, the men from the Enterprise followed suit. When all the utensils were collected, the two powerful creatures trundled their heavy load back up the slope towards the stockade.

"A couple of minutes' rest, and then they come and put us to work in the mines," explained Arlom.

"How long have you been here, sir?" asked Sulu politely.

Arlom turned to his aide for confirmation. "Nearly a year, now," he said, and his companion nodded.

"Haven't you tried to escape?" said the impetuous Chekov.

"To what end?" asked the Andorian. "The rest of the planet is very barren. I doubt if there's any food, except what's provided here. We couldn't overpower the Gnaar, there are too many of them. So we couldn't take a ship, and even if we could, how would we know how to fly it? Or where to go, if we managed to learn."

It was all extremely logical, as Chekov would have realised if he had stopped to think before speaking. But fortunately the Andorian did not seem to be put out by his thoughtless question. However, there was reproof in the Vulcan's comment.

"Mr. Chekov," he said, "I think we must remain calm and co-operative until we determine all the complications of our situation."

"Yes," replied the Andorian. "don't make any trouble - please. It won't do you any good. They are too numerous and too powerful."

As if to emphasise his point, the area was suddenly full of Gnaar, who moved forward in a solid line, hustling the men before them towards the high cliffs at the far end of the arena.

Dark tunnel mouths marked the openings to the mine, and the men entered. Stacks of picks and shovels stood by the entrance, and following the example of those before them, each Enterprise man picked up a tool and tailed on along the well-lit galleries. They reached the work face, and joined in with the workers who had already started.

The delagmite appeared as a dark red crystalline substance, layered among the ubiquitous grey stone which seemed to form most of the planet. It was fairly easy to extract, as the underground stone, dry and unweathered, yielded easily to the onslaught of well-wielded picks. The shovels were used to pile the dusty red lumps into large boxes on wheels, which were then trundled back to the outside, and tipped out to

form an ever-growing pile.

"They must beam it aboard the freighters at night," explained Arlom. "I've never seen it happen, but it's always gone by the morning, and every third day one of their big ships goes away, so I'm told."

The work was not hard, but it was monotonous and tiring, and they were kept at it without a break for long hours. Gnaar came and went continually, watching to see that everyone was working, and prodding and striking those they thought were slacking to encourage more effort.

Spock and Scott worked together, taking alternate turns with the pick and the shovel and uniting to push the loaded trucks outside. The work was not overly arduous for either of them, and they took the chance to use their eyes and learn all they could. Spock was especially fascinated by the variety of life forms among the toiling captives. There were a great many Human or humanoid types, but there were also several other races represented, including some he had never before encountered. Most he could put a name to, from his extensive reading and study, but some defeated even that, and were totally unknown to him. Evidently the Gnaar ranged far and wide to acquire workers for their mines.

A questioning thought crossed Spock's mind. The Gnaar had just brought in over two hundred new workers. Did this mean that they were increasing their output? Or just augmenting their work force? Or - did it have a more sinister implication? Did it mean that they needed more slaves from time to time to replace those lost for some other reason? And if so, what was it? Did some slaves die? From what cause? From ill treatment, lack of food, overwork, or was delagmite a harmful substance? He resolved to talk to Arlom at the earliest opportunity, to find out just what the situation was.

At last the long working day came to an end. As the Gnaar shepherded the workers out of the tunnels they left their tools in a pile by the entrance and wandered out into the arena again.

Scott banged the clinging dust from his trousers. He glanced up at the already darkening sky as others of the Enterprise group joined them.

"It isn't a twenty-four hour day here, is it, Mr. Spock?"

"You are correct, Mr. Scott," returned the Vulcan. "It appears to be a cycle of seventeen hours fifty three minutes."

"How do you know so exactly?" Chekov asked curiously.

"Vulcans have an innate time sense," replied Spock. "I just know it. I suppose that subconsciously we must register the variations of light and darkness, and compute the cycle."

The men wandered up the slope towards the stockade in a companionable group. It was an odd fact of their imprisonment, that such easy conversation had increased among the men from the Enterprise. On board ship, Chekov would never have dared to ask such a question, but here it seemed quite natural, and showed no diminution of the respect he had for the Vulcan, both as an officer and as a person. It was as if talking more freely helped morale, encouraging the feeling that they must all stick together and support each other in this time of difficulty.

Spock did not get his opportunity to question Arlom until one morning a few days later, as they found a space side by side to eat the nourishing but uninteresting food that was their daily ration. He told Arlom of the thoughts and questions that had crossed his mind.

"Your speculation has covered all the facts," said the Andorian. "More delagmite is being mined and more faces opened. But the other thought is true, too. We *do* lose slaves from time to time. Some get injured in the course of work, some are too old or too frail to cope. Some cannot manage the food."

His pale blue face was thoughtful as he continued. "As long as they keep on going and work, the Gnaar take no notice, and the rest of us do try to cover for anyone who is finding it hard. But if they get too bad - we cannot help them." A sad look came over his face as he thought about it. "If they collapse, the Gnaar just pick them up and carry them away. At first we thought they might be going to look after them till they were better, but we soon found out it was not so. They just don't come back. I'm afraid we must assume that they die."

As day followed day, the new workers gradually settled into the pattern that Arlom had shown them. It was a dull and monotonous existence, but although they all kept their ears and eyes open, they learned nothing that gave them any ideas for improving matters. Long discussions went on among the various groups in their free time, but no answers were found. Although for a long time the strongest-willed of them hankered for escape, they were eventually worn down by the less bold who could see no possibility of success. At last most settled into a resigned routine, just waiting to see if any new day would bring changes.

Leaning against the grey rocky wall, Scott sat beside Spock as they dutifully ate their uninspiring breakfast.

"What's to become of us, Mr. Spock?" he asked morosely. "By my reckoning, we've been here for over a month now. I can see no way of trying to escape, can you?"

"No, Mr. Scott," replied the Vulcan soberly. "Even if we were to unite everyone to overcome the Gnaar, there is no guarantee that we would be able to achieve any more than that, and that would leave us worse off than before. Many might be hurt in the attempt, and if we are then forced to surrender, punishment would be inevitable. At least, for the moment we are fed, and not abused."

"Is that enough to keep going on, though?" mused Scott, not really expecting an answer.

"Mr. Scott," said Spock firmly, "We *do* have something else to sustain us - the certain knowledge that Captain Kirk will be making every possible effort to find and rescue us."

Scott turned a surprised face towards the Vulcan, who was gazing across the dull grey compound but whose mind was evidently ranging far away.

"Why, Mr. Spock," he said softly. "It sounds to me as if you are actually confessing to a Human emotion. That sounded to me very like 'hope'."

Spock raised an eyebrow, but did not meet the other's eye.

"You may be right, Mr. Scott."

The Vulcan's confidence in his Captain was not misplaced; for, far away from this unhappy prison, he was very busy.

He had awakened to find himself in the Enterprise sickbay suffering from a badly broken arm and considerable severe bruising. But the discomfort of that was forgotten as he remembered the events that had disrupted the peaceful revelry on Dorsina.

Despite all McCoy's efforts to restrain him, to enforce the rest he needed for recovery, he had discharged himself from sickbay at once. He had then set about finding out exactly what had happened, and the grim discovery had all but quenched his fighting spirit.

A third of his crew was missing, all male, and including most of his best men. Sulu, Chekov, Scott and half his best engineers were among them, plus twenty good security men and a lot of expert technicians in different fields.

But worst of all was the picture that kept invading his mind, the memory of Spock, hanging limp and unconscious in the grip of one of those ferocious feline creatures. How badly was he hurt? Where had he and all the others been taken? So many questions to be answered. So much to be found out.

He was glad to discover that, for once, he had the full and unstinted support of all Federation resources.

Among the secure desk-bound administrators, someone with a bit of sense had realised the importance of the event. Invasion of Federation space, entry into their galaxy by a race as alien, as fierce and potentially dangerous as these had been, could not be taken lightly. Many vulnerable members looked to the Federation for protection. The threat must be met with strength. These invaders must be found, and deterred from repeating the offence, to ensure the future safety of every world that expected the Federation to help in their defence.

Kirk was offered every assistance. Replacement staff of the highest qualifications were rushed to him at top speed, some even requisitioned from other ships, whose Captains protested at the 'piracy' - but only until the reason for the demand was explained to them. Then most offered to lend men most willingly.

Within a week, the Enterprise had a full complement and was functional, with every member of the crew ready to go into action.

But, to the great frustration of Kirk, his officers and his willing crew, that was as far as it got!

Although there were plenty of eye-witnesses who could tell in detail what the invaders looked like and how they had acted, there was no-one who could say where they had come from or where they had gone! Some of the ships orbiting Dorsina had picked up the alien craft on their sensors, and could give good descriptions of her when they checked

them. She was reported to be very large, of totally alien design, and her means of propulsion could only be speculated upon as it was nothing known to the Federation.

One ship had even charted the direction of her departure, and this had raised great hopes. Several of the fastest available ships had set out at once, hoping to pick up a trail. But expectations and hopes were dashed when they reported that, whatever means of propulsion the alien ship possessed, it was much faster than they were and left no trail to follow.

Days became weeks, and weeks progressed towards months with no sign of any breakthrough. The Enterprise had been given permission to follow a course calculated by projecting the course that the alien ship had been seen to start out on. She was soon well out into uncharted space and pressing on blindly, while listening carefully to every report that came in of the endless enquiries that were going on.

Then, when all hope had begun to fade and despair was setting in, they got the break they needed.

A craft was spotted by the sensors, travelling slowly towards them. Communications were quickly established, and Kirk found himself talking to a weary-looking man in a battered naval-style cap, who identified himself as Max MacLean, master of the trading vessel Charlie.

"We're limping home, Captain Kirk," he explained. "And very glad to be alive to do it, too. We got driven so far out of our way by that blasted ion storm, I thought we'd never make it back to any trading lanes that I could recognise."

Kirk congratulated him on making it back, and offered to transport over to him some vital supplies. While this was being done, MacLean continued the conversation.

"What are you doing this far out, Captain? We're beyond Federation space here." He didn't really expect much of an answer. If Kirk was on secret business, he wouldn't tell him anyway. He was only really making conversation because he was so relieved to see a friendly face.

But Kirk was a desperate man, ready to clutch at any straw, and he told the man what had happened to his ship and his men.

"What kind of ship are you looking for, Captain?" MacLean asked curiously.

Kirk immediately told him all that was known of the aliens.

"That'd be a pretty big vessel," said MacLean thoughtfully.

"Yes. Have you seen one?" asked Kirk excitedly.

"No, Captain," said the man quickly. "You're the first ship we've seen for weeks, but..."

"What?" demanded Kirk.

"A ship that size would cause a bit of disturbance, wouldn't it?" mused MacLean, almost to himself. "We had our sensors working full power, seeking for assistance, you understand, Captain. And we did pick up a touch of disturbance, a long way out, at the very furthest range of our equipment. But I didn't pursue it, as I knew it was in the wrong direction for us, and soon after that, we picked you up."

"Can you give me all the details?" demanded Kirk eagerly. The man complied quickly, giving the precise area in which he had plotted the disturbance.

"I'm not saying it was a ship, mind," he said.

"Yes, I understand that," said Kirk, "But if we go that way, we may find out."

He thanked the man, and saw him on his way, limping slowly homeward. Then he turned to his enlivened bridge crew, and gave the orders to take them towards the point that the man had indicated. They responded instantly, heartened by the new hope. The navigator and helmsman were a study in concentration as they sat, heads close together, working out the details of the course that would take them by the shortest route to the area that the Captain of the Charlie had designated.

Kirk called down to Engineering to ask for as much speed as could be managed. He felt a pang of regret at the strange accent that replied to him. Duval was a good engineer and a conscientious worker, but his high-pitched Gallic accent jarred on Kirk's highly-strung nerves when he was longing to hear again the familiar dour Scottish tones he was used to, supporting and reassuring him in any emergency.

Meanwhile, what had been happening to those who were the object of this desperate search? For them, unaware of the extreme efforts being made for their rescue, day followed day with the same dismal and boring routine. The Enterprise men settled down, since they had no option, and worked without too much grumbling. They were sustained mainly by the behaviour of the senior officers. Spock maintained an unruffled dignity, even though he looked as dusty and work-soiled as the rest, and constantly projected the idea that they must remain calm and wait patiently for the rescue that would ultimately come. Scott backed him up whole-heartedly, and swiftly silenced with a few fierce words of his own any grumblings or mutters of doubt. He knew, just as well as Spock, the value of discipline in desperate situations, and, showing the same loyalty that he had always given Kirk, helped the Vulcan to maintain morale.

They soon came to like and appreciate the Andorian Arlom. His friendliness was like sunshine in a very dull world, and his efforts clearly did a great deal to sustain the easy running of the camp. They noticed how, every morning, while the inmates were eating breakfast, he made a point of walking round the compound, closely followed by his aide, having a word with as many of the men as he could. He even managed some sort of communication with the more alien ones, whose language was a mystery to the Humans, thus adding to their isolation.

Then one morning came a revealing incident. Spock and Scott were sitting with their backs to the supporting stockade when Arlom passed in front of them, a few yards away.

"Morning, Arlom," called Scott in friendly greeting. There was no response; Arlom walked onward, totally ignoring the Scotsman's call.

Scott was irritated. "What's the matter with him?" he snapped. "Not talking to us, is he?"

Arlom stopped to talk to a group of men a few yards further on. His aide Gren threw a look at his master, then glanced back at the irate

officer. Coming to a swift decision, he scuttled back to the two Enterprise men, and dropped down to sit facing them.

"Please let me explain, Mr. Scott," he said earnestly. "My master did not mean to offend you. He just didn't hear you."

"He was close enough," grunted Scott, not appeased.

"I know," said Gren. "But he does not hear at all, you see. When we were captured, he suffered injury. His antennae were seriously damaged, and although they have now healed, their function is impaired. His hearing is badly affected - also his sight to some degree."

Spock was interested, his natural curiosity aroused.

"But he holds conversations perfectly."

"Yes," agreed Gren. "He has taught himself to lipread fluently. Also, at home he was a keen student of languages, so he already had some knowledge of the various tongues used by the many different races here." His pride in his clever master showed clearly in his voice.

"But, you see," he went on, "he needs to see that you are talking to him. He doesn't hear if you call. You have to get his whole attention first."

"I understand, Gren," said Scott warmly, now completely mollified. He gazed at the tall Andorian, now moving on to bring strength to others with his comforting words.

"He's done well to have overcome such a handicap," he added, admiration in his voice.

Pleased to have put things right, Gren hurried off to join his master, and the two continued their rounds. The two Enterprise officers watched his progress until it was time to move. Each had gained a new respect for the blue-skinned alien.

Then one dull morning a few days later, tragedy struck.

It happened as the prisoners enjoyed their few quiet minutes between breakfast and the start of work. The two Gnaar with their heavy trolley had almost finished collecting up their quota of dishes, and the others were just swarming into the compound ready to rouse the men to their feet and drive them to work.

There was a muffled grunt and a snarl from one of the Gnaar pushing the loaded trolley. Its wheel hit a stone loosened in the dust, and it turned awkwardly. In a moment, impelled by its own weight, the trolley slipped from the grabbing paws of the Gnaar in charge of it and began to trundle down the slope. The Gnaar snatched for it, but, heavily loaded, it eluded them and gathered speed, spilling dishes noisily.

This din attracted the attention of the prisoners, and alerted them to get out of its way - all but one.

Totally unaware of that was happening behind him, Arlom was walking in leisurely fashion towards the cave mouth, right in the path of the runaway trolley. For once, his constant shadow Gren was not in evidence. He had been delayed by someone who had requested his help to fix a broken sandal strap.

As soon as Arlom's danger was seen by the others, dozens of warning

yells rang out. But of course poor Arlom did not hear them and continued on his oblivious way.

Spock, who was just getting to his feet, was the quickest to react. With a terrific burst of speed he raced across the compound, intent on pushing the Andorian out of harm's way. He was so fast that he would have succeeded.

But the Gnaar had been startled by the sudden burst of shouts and yells. Perhaps they thought them the prelude to a revolt or disturbance. Maybe they thought the figure racing across the ground was part of an escape plot.

In any event, a couple of them, reacting instinctively, attempted to grab Spock with their large furry paws. The Vulcan dodged them adroitly, but they had impeded his progress. He reached the Andorian in time to push him violently forward out of the way, but was not quick enough to save himself. The heavy trolley knocked him down and ran over his left leg.

For a short while there was complete chaos in the compound. The deflected trolley toppled over, shedding dishes with a widespread clatter. The men were shouting and yelling and the Gnaar were grunting and snarling. There was movement everywhere except for one figure lying still on the hard dusty ground.

The Gnaar in charge of the section quelled the hubbub with a mighty bellow. He had seen all that had happened and was furious. He pushed his way through the group and glanced at the Vulcan still lying on the ground, though now struggling to sit up. He could tell, as could the others, that the unnatural position of the Vulcan's leg meant that it was broken and severely damaged.

With a snarl, he cuffed the nearest Gnaar, one of those who had impeded Spock. He slung a string of guttural sounds at the unlucky creature, including as well all the others around.

"You fools, you imbeciles!" he snarled. "He was a very strong worker! Now he's useless, curse your stupidity!"

The recipient Gnaar looked cowed by his fury, and when he yelled, "Remove him! Get the rest to work!" they hurried to obey.

Two hefty Gnaar grabbed the Vulcan and began to carry him away. The protests of the Humans were quickly quelled. Those who tried to move towards the group were blocked, and cuffed to the ground if they persisted. Those who continued to resist were just picked up bodily and carried into the mine, where normal working was firmly enforced. There was much unrest among the Enterprise men, but they were not allowed a moment's respite to discuss their worries. The Gnaar watched them like hawks, and lashed out blows and buffets freely if they tried to talk to each other.

Arlom was particularly distressed, and he was quite desperate with guilt and remorse, although none of the others would have thought to blame him. As the day wore on, anxiety gave way to despair and deepest depression.

Naturally, when they finally emerged from their tunnels, the gray compound was empty. Unnaturally silent, they were jostled into the stockade. The darkness came down quickly as usual, but there was little sleep for the Enterprise men. In quiet desperate voices they discussed what had happened, and speculated miserably about what had become of

Spock until sheer fatigue overcame them and they dozed fitfully.

Scott said little, even when Sulu and Chekov tried to talk to him. He, more than any, was devastated by what had occurred. Apart from his genuine respect and admiration for the Vulcan, he knew, only too well, that it had been the Vulcan's calmness and air of authority that had sustained hope among the prisoners. Would discipline fall apart without his influence? How far could he, Scott, take Spock's place in maintaining morale? He would try, with all his might, but he had grave misgivings about his ability to succeed.

In the morning, the mood of the prisoners was very quiet and subdued. They collected their food silently, and sat down to eat it rather aimlessly. Even those who had only known the Vulcan a short time felt the difference in atmosphere caused by his absence.

Scott found a place on his own and forced down the uninviting food. He didn't particularly feel like it but he knew he had to set an example, had to make an effort for the sake of the others.

Sulu and Chekov sat together not far away, their young faces gloomy and subdued. They threw glances at Scott from time to time, and he knew they were seeking a lead from him, but at the moment he felt too down himself to give it to them.

What could he say to them anyway?

Arlom came slowly towards him. The Andorian looked distraught. He sank down beside Scott, with Gren close behind him.

"Mr. Scott," he began. His voice was almost a whisper and the words faltered. "What can I say to you? Mr. Spock saved my life - and his death will be on my conscience all the rest of my days."

"I suppose, " said Scott tentatively, "that there is no doubt... no possibility...?"

Arlom shook his head and tears started in his pale eyes.

"I had to know, Mr. Scott," he said quietly. "I managed to get one of their guards to tell me where he was taken. I've learned a little of their language. It's dreadful, dreadful!" He hid his face in his hands. Gren gently stroked his master's shoulder, trying as hard as he could to comfort his misery.

Scott found a strength that he didn't know he possessed.

"Tell me, Arlom," he ordered. "Tell me it all. I have to know - to tell my Captain when he comes."

The Andorian made a valiant effort to pull himself together. Gazing stonily across the compound, he gave Scott the grisly details he had learned.

"Outside the camp, over that hill there," he said quietly, "there is a deep pit. In there, they throw all the bodies, and also those still alive who they consider are finished. It's too deep for anyone to climb out."

Both sat in miserable silence as their minds filled with pictures of how dreadful that place must be. Scott's heart quailed at the thought. A broken leg would not have killed the Vulcan, so Spock must still have been alive when he was thrown into the pit - into a hell-hole

full of corpses and rotting remains. To die slowly of starvation in such surroundings would be a terrible end for the proud Vulcan!

He made a private resolve that he would not tell the others the details and asked Arlom to promise not to reveal them either. It would be better if they did not know, he decided. When the time came, he would tell Captain Kirk, though the prospect appalled him. He sat there silently, thinking about his Captain. Was he searching for them? Yes - he was sure he was, just as Spock had been totally confident. But why couldn't the fates have been kinder, and let him find them before all this had happened?

What hopes would have been raised if Scott had known just how near the Enterprise was! For ironically, Scott's hopes were dying just after Jim Kirk's had come to life, following his encounter with Max MacLean.

The Enterprise sped onwards, all her crew intent on the new course, and what it might bring them to. Kirk sat in his chair, trying to appear calm, but in reality on edge with anticipation. Could this be the break they had been waiting for? Weeks of failure put doubts in his mind, but he tried to push them aside as he waited to see if this chance encounter with the Charlie had indeed given them a trustworthy new hope.

"Captain," said a voice behind him urgently. He swung round to the Science station, stifling the pang that hit him. Erikson was so very blond, due to his Nordic ancestry! Still he was a good and efficient scientist, though not in Spock's class. But then very few were.

"Mr. Erikson," Kirk acknowledged, and awaited the information that the man was evidently eager to give him.

"Captain," repeated the man, "we are getting a definite trace now, and it is consistent with a very large vessel using the unknown means of propulsion that we have been speculating about."

"Keep on it, Mr. Erikson," ordered Kirk firmly, trying to hold down the tide of excitement rising in him, "and give me any more information as you acquire it."

It took the Enterprise several days at best warp speed to be absolutely sure that they were following the trail of a very large ship, and several more before a very long-distance scan revealed that it was being crewed by creatures resembling those who had raided Dorsina. But this, at last, was really positive news, and made the long wait and all the previous disappointments fade away into the past. Everyone felt their energy being re-charged for whatever action was to come.

Whether the aliens knew they were being watched and followed was not clear. In any case, it didn't seem to bother them. They made no challenge to their pursuers. The truth was that the Gnaar were totally unused to encountering other ships that could challenge them. Their speed was such that if any ship sought a response from them, they either captured the crew if it was a small enough vessel or, if it was a large one, they simply ignored it and moved away at a pace impossible to follow. And this was their reaction to the Enterprise as she neared them.

But they hadn't allowed for the stubborn persistence of the Enterprise and her Captain and crew. Although Kirk had been a little

dismayed to see his quarry draw effortlessly away from him, he had stuck on the now easily-followable trail, and had, at long last, had his reward.

He was drawing closer by the hour to a small planet round which the large ship was slowly and ponderously orbiting. On the bridge the excitement grew as every eye was rivetted to what the viewscreen was revealing.

"Mr. Erikson," said Kirk decisively. "Can you put us into an orbit that will keep us on the opposite side of the planet from that ship, till we can tell from the scanners just what's down there."

Erikson immediately went into a consultation with the navigator and helmsman. Between them they quickly achieved the desired result. Scanners were immediately focused on the dreary-looking planet beneath them. Information poured in, and with each report the excitement aboard the Enterprise increased.

Kirk was jubilant! After all the disappointments and delays, he had found what he was searching for. On the planet below were large numbers of the feline creatures that had attacked Dorsina, but also showing were a great many groups from other races, including Humans. He was now absolutely sure that he had found the place where his men had been brought, and he could not wait to go down and rescue them.

But he forced himself to delay long enough to comply with regulations. Detailed messages were sent off to advise the Federation, although as they were a long way out they knew it would be a long time before they were picked up.

Then Kirk called a meeting of all department heads to formulate a proper plan. He found that their experts had been doing their work very well, and in rapid time too, and had much information to give him.

He learned that although the alien ship was very large and in open space very fast, at its present slow orbiting speed it was very vulnerable to attack by such a well-armed vessel as the Enterprise. Half a dozen well-aimed shots would disable it easily, he was told.

"Phasers on heavy stun should be sufficient," he ordered, "but be prepared to kill if necessary." He visualised what he would find down on the planet, and added two more orders. "Take care that no-one else is harmed; there are other aliens down there as well as the felines; and I also want a number of translators ready so that we can make ourselves understood and reassure them."

When it came to putting all the plans into action, the whole affair went very smoothly indeed. The Gnaar had never before been attacked. They were used to sweeping away all resistance easily, and when it came to a showdown, they succumbed very easily. After a few had been downed with the stun-strength phaser fire of the security men, much to the fear and amazement of their fellows, the remainder quickly surrendered.

The prisoners slaving in the mining tunnels had no idea what was going on outside. The first they knew that anything was happening was when a Gnaar came running into the tunnel emitting a string of guttural snarls and grunts. The other guards immediately left the toiling prisoners and followed him out.

When they didn't return, some of the braver men downed tools and

ventured towards the tunnel entrance. Scott was among them, with Sulu and Chekov at his heels.

Suddenly Sulu lifted his head.

"Listen!" he said. "That noise! I'm sure it's phaser fire."

"I think you're right, laddie," said Scott, and moved forward more quickly. He was in the front of the group that reached the opening of the tunnel first, and what a sight met their eyes.

The grey dust compound was crowded now, and the predominant colour was red!

Scott's heart lifted as he recognised the uniform of the Enterprise security men, most of whom he knew by sight anyway.

He turned to call back down the tunnel.

"Come on out, everyone! Help's arrived! The Enterprise is here!"

The prisoners emerged from the tunnel in a jubilant stream. Those from the Enterprise rushed forward to greet friends and acquaintances among the security men, while the others milled around, not quite believing what they saw. They were approached by men bearing translators and were soon hearing reassuring words each in his own tongue.

Kirk was full of excitement as he greeted one man after another. He shook Sulu's hand warmly and slapped Chekov on the back, but as he pushed through the noisy and vociferous crowd, his eyes were desperately searching for another familiar figure.

He was aware of someone beside him, and turned.

"Bones," he said, and there was a tinge of fear in his voice. "I can't see him. Where is he?"

Scott had greeted several security men warmly, but had halted his advance when he caught sight of a gold uniform with a blue one close beside it.

Captain Kirk and Dr. McCoy.

There was no way he could avoid the confrontation, much as he was dreading it. He tried to summon up his courage.

Kirk suddenly spotted the engineer's familiar stocky form, and pushed eagerly through the group towards him.

"Great to see you, Scotty!" he said. "Where's Spock?"

There was no answer.

"Where is he, Scotty?"

The almost shouted question hung on the heavy air. But the man addressed so urgently could not meet his Captain's eye, and James Kirk felt the cold hand of fear clutch at his heart. It could not be that he had worked so hard, come so far, waited so long, only to be too late to help his friend!

He reached forward, grabbed the Engineer by the shoulders and almost shook the solid frame. "Tell me, Scotty!" he ordered, desperation bringing a tremor to his voice.

Scott was no coward. This was one of the hardest tasks he had ever tackled, but he had to do it. In plain words, hiding nothing, he told Kirk and McCoy exactly what had happened, how Spock had saved Arlom, had been injured himself, and what had happened to him then. Three pairs of haunted eyes followed the finger that pointed over the hill, visualising the horror that lay there.

"When, Scotty?" whispered Kirk at last.

"Ten, eleven days ago," replied Scott.

Kirk turned agonised eyes to McCoy. "Bones?" he queried.

McCoy ached desperately to ease the pain in Kirk's eyes, but he had to be honest.

"Unlikely, Jim," he said gently. "Under the circumstances."

"I must know," said Kirk, and charged off towards the top gate. McCoy hurried after him, and after a moment's indecision, Scott followed.

Some instinct told Kirk which way to turn. He charged up a rough path that seemed to lead in the direction that Scott had indicated. As he came over the rise, he knew his instinct was right. The stench that assailed him was diabolical, and almost stopped him in his tracks. But he pushed on resolutely, and soon was standing on the edge of the noisome pit, struggling to control the nausea that threatened.

He felt rather than saw McCoy and Scott join him, and heard their gasps of indrawn breath as the horrid reality of the place hit them too. Scott turned and moved away; Kirk only vaguely registered the fact. Somehow he felt rooted to the spot, unable to force himself to move.

But Scott, practical as ever, was now back at his side, lugging two large planks and a length of rope, items he had noticed as they'd passed a hut just by the gate. With the help of a nearby tree, the articles served their purpose.

Scott braced the rope with his considerable strength as Kirk and McCoy climbed down into Hell, and began their despairing search. The planks helped a little as they endeavoured to move over the indescribable slime that carpeted the pit.

Kirk stood frozen in dread by what he had found.

The Vulcan had dragged himself to a remote corner of the pit and had wedged himself upright between two rocks. He sat there aloofly, his long legs stretched out before him, and his lean hands clasped in his lap in meditative mood. His head was back against the grey rock behind him, his face was drawn and colourless, and his eyes were closed; he looked composed, remote - and lifeless.

"Bones," said Kirk urgently. It came out as an almost soundless croak, so he cleared his throat and called again.

McCoy squelched towards him through the evil-smelling mud, trying

to avoid the whitening skeletons. He gasped as he saw what was holding Kirk transfixed.

Although it seemed a useless action, his normal professional instinct made him draw out his medical scanner and activate it. To his utter astonishment, there was a flicker of a reading on it. Disbelievingly, he rechecked, not quite accepting what he saw. But yes, it was true - the Vulcan was still alive!

Turning to Kirk, who was still standing as if turned to stone, he shook his arm urgently.

"Come on, Jim," he said. "Call the ship - beam us up."

Kirk did not move, so he shook him again. "Jim, snap out of it!" he ordered. "He's still alive! I need to get him to sickbay."

Kirk gave a gasp at the unbelievable words, and was galvanised into action. In very short order, the three were back aboard the Enterprise, and orderlies were lifting the limp, mud-caked form onto a stretcher.

As they moved off, Kirk made as if to follow, but McCoy put out a hand to stop him.

"No, Jim," he said. "He's my job now. You have another - to rescue all those poor wretches down there and get them aboard to safety and comfort. And we left poor Scotty standing - he deserves a word."

Kirk nodded, aware now of where his duty lay. He moved to stand beside the stretcher, gazing down at the familiar face. Then, for just a second, he laid his hand gently against the pale cheek.

Then, squaring his shoulders firmly, he left with a firm stride, already putting his very able mind to the task of organising the swift and efficient rescue of the erstwhile prisoners from that dreadful planet below. It would be a bit of a squeeze to get them all accommodated aboard the Enterprise, but he knew he could rely on the co-operation of his ever-helpful crew.

As McCoy walked after the stretcher, his mind was working overtime. His task would not be easy either. Soon his sickbay would be flooded with patients, since many of the prisoners were suffering from the effects of overwork and incorrect diet to say nothing of illness, but right now he would need all his skill to save this most-important one. The spark of life in the Vulcan was very low.

By the attitude in which they had found him, he knew that Spock had composed himself to die with dignity, probably using a special meditative trance to help him. He *had* to be roused from that state. But in his weakened condition, that itself could be dangerous.

Hurrying on, he directed the orderlies into the small side ward that he found most suitable for the Vulcan. Dismissing them, for their services would soon be needed elsewhere, he summoned a nurse. He sent her for a large dose of a specific stimulant, and, as he waited, studied the lights on the diagnostic panel over the bed. The vital signs were low, perilously low, and unstable, fluctuating in an alarming fashion.

The nurse returned with the hypo. He took it and sent her away. This was his responsibility - his alone. He studied the dosage, knowing

that his decision could mean life or death for the Vulcan. But delay could be fatal too! So, steeling himself, he approached the bed, and firmly pressed the hypo against the cold shoulder of his patient. He held his breath as he watched, waiting for the reaction.

For a few moments there was none. Then the Vulcan stirred. His head moved slightly from side to side, and he seemed to be gasping for breath. McCoy remembered previous occasions when the Vulcan had had to be roused from a trance-like state. With an almost instinctive action, he raised his hand and slapped the pale face hard. Spock's eyelids flickered open momentarily as his head rolled with the blow, then closed again. McCoy forced himself to repeat the action. This time the dark eyes stayed open. They focused on him, then slowly traversed the room, finally returning to meet his anxious gaze.

McCoy heaved an inward sigh of relief. The dark eyes were aware and intelligent as Spock assessed the situation.

"Yes, Spock," said McCoy. "You're alive, and safe aboard the Enterprise. We made it - just in time."

Spock nodded in understanding. His lips moved, and his voice came quietly.

"The others?" he whispered.

"They're all fine," said McCoy reassuringly. "Jim's down there organizing the rescue. They'll soon all be safely aboard."

The Vulcan nodded wearily. He was too exhausted for much conversation.

Now that the crisis was over, McCoy was all professional bustle.

"Just you relax now, Spock," he ordered. "I'll get someone in to clean you up, and we'll get that leg fixed. Then you can rest in comfort and get your strength back."

Jim Kirk walked wearily along the corridor, and entered his quarters. He was dog-tired, but nevertheless, still buoyed up by the feeling of satisfaction over a job well done. All the former prisoners were safely aboard the Enterprise, including, miraculously, all of his missing crewmembers. The leaders of the Gnaar were securely stowed in the brig, their slave ship had been disabled, thus effectively marooning the remainder of the Gnaar on the planet until decisions were made about what action should be taken.

The gruesome pit had been filled in, and carefully marked as the final resting place of the unfortunates of many races.

Kirk dropped his mud-stained clothes into the laundry chute, and showered. It did a lot to refresh him, though only a good night's sleep would restore him fully.

But first he had a call to make - to sickbay. McCoy's voice sounded tired but cheerful. In reply to Kirk's question about how things were, he replied, "Fine, Jim. I've got a full house, but thankfully no serious cases. Lots of rest and some decent food will put most of them right, though what some of the stranger ones *do* eat I've no idea." He would have rattled on further, but Kirk interrupted.

"Bones, stop teasing me. I'm too tired. Spock?"

"He's great, Jim," said McCoy, and his voice softened with affection. "He's very weak, half starved, and he's got a badly broken leg, but I've dealt with that and he's regaining strength fast - every hour shows improvement. He'll do."

"Can I come down and see him?" asked Kirk.

"No, not tonight," suggested McCoy gently. "He's asleep, and it sounds as if you should be too. Get a decent night's rest, and see him tomorrow - he's not going to disappear."

It was good advice, as McCoy's usually was, and Kirk followed it.

When he strode into sickbay next morning, he was feeling bright and alert again, and was able to study, with interest, the many and varying occupants of the beds in the large wards. He had a word and a wave for all of them, and even those who couldn't understand what he said responded to his welcoming smile and friendly manner.

A blue-skinned Andorian accosted him with an anxious question. His face lit up at the good news Kirk was able to give him, and he at once hurried round the beds to pass it on to as many as he could.

McCoy led Kirk into the little side ward, and he felt much better as he observed for himself the improvement in his Vulcan friend's condition. His colour was much better and he seemed relaxed and peaceful.

Knowing that rest was vital to Spock's recovery, and not really wanting to disturb him, Kirk slid gently into the chair beside the bed. He would have been quite content just to sit there and watch him, but the movement, slight and cautious as it had been, was enough to rouse the lightly-sleeping Vulcan. His dark eyes opened and warmed as he recognised his visitor. Emboldened by the slight movement towards him of the lean hand lying on the bedcover, Kirk reached out and enfolded it in his own.

"Hi, Spock," he said with a gentle smile. "How are you?"

"Improving steadily, I believe," replied the Vulcan, making no attempt to withdraw his hand. "And the others?"

"All fine," said Kirk cheerfully. "McCoy's in his element; sickbay is full, but nobody is desperately ill, so he's enjoying running it all." Spock nodded, fully able to visualise the scene. "There are some unusual aliens there, aren't there?" asked Kirk with a smile. "Oh, that reminds me. I had an Andorian asking about you."

"That would be Arlom," commented Spock.

"He seemed very glad to hear you were recovering," Kirk said. "And Scotty wants me to let him know how you are, too. He'd like to visit you when you're fit enough."

"I shall welcome that," replied Spock. "Shared hardship has heightened our relationship."

"You mean you are even better friends than you were?" said Kirk.

"I believe I said that," Spock countered, knowing that Kirk was only teasing gently. He was quite content to be experiencing that again.

Kirk could quite happily have sat there for hours, making trivial conversation, just wallowing in the pleasure of having the Vulcan there, knowing that he was safe and recovering, but he had a healthy respect for the protest this would arouse in McCoy. So, when the Doctor put his head round the door a few moments later, he said placatingly, "All right, Bones, I'm going. I know he needs to rest."

Several days later he bounced into the sickbay hardly able to contain his excitement. On McCoy's orders, the Vulcan was still confined to bed to give his leg a chance to heal properly. But he was much better. He sat, propped up with pillows, and if the truth were known slightly bored by the enforced inactivity. So he found the visit from his Captain particularly welcome.

"Great news, Spock!" said Kirk, settling into the convenient chair by the side of the bed. The Vulcan waited, knowing that he didn't need to ask questions, for his Captain was obviously dying to tell him something.

"I've been on to Starfleet Command!" he began.

"Already?" said Spock, startled into comment. "I thought we were too far out."

"Yes, so did I," said Kirk. "But listen, and I'll explain. I made out a detailed report to get off as quickly as I could. But the 'powers that be' must be worried about this one, for I found out that we'd been followed by a chain of vessels designed purely to boost and pass on our signals. So I was able to get our news back fast, and our new orders have come out just as quickly." He paused to grin at his friend, and then went on.

"They've given us a nice job this time, Spock," he said happily. "First we've to continue on our way back, and rendezvous with a Starship - they didn't specify which one, the nearest available, I suppose. They will take off our Gnaar prisoners - I'll be glad to be rid of them! They will also take back all our temporary staff, for all our crewmen who were prisoners will be perfectly fit to resume their duties by then. Scotty will be delighted to get Duval out of 'his' engine-room!" He laughed out loud at the thought.

"But this is the best bit, Spock," he went on. "I've left Sulu and Chekov working on it already. We have to plan an extended tour that will enable us to deliver as many as possible of our present guests right to their own home planets. That should be rather interesting, shouldn't it?"

"Indeed," responded the Vulcan, his tone brightening as the implications of it all filled his active mind. To see the home planets of some of the more exotic of the Gnaar's victims would indeed be a very fascinating experience, and would provide vast amounts of research material to store into his computer.

He relaxed against his pillows, already thinking and planning ahead. The experience with the Gnaar had not been a pleasant one, but the outcome promised a great deal of satisfaction.

Kirk suddenly chuckled as he watched him.

"I really don't know about you, Spock," he said. "We rescue you, just in the nick of time, and even before you're fit again I can see all the little wheels whizzing round in that mind of yours."

Spock, as expected, gave him an indignant look as he raised an eyebrow. "My mind, Captain," he protested, "does not function mechanically."

"Don't I know it," agreed Kirk. "If it did, I might find it easier to understand. I was always good at mechanical engineering!"

He laughed out loud at the mock-reproving look on his First Officer's face. Spock knew he was being teased, and was responding as expected just to please his Captain. It was the outward expression of something special. Although neither would put it into emotional words, both were sharing the same feeling of relief and pleasure at being safely reunited.

